THE COVERT USE OF THE GLOBAL SPECIAL OPERATIONS NETWORK AND THE MILITARIZATION OF COVERT ACTION IN POLITICAL WARFARE AND THE GRAY ZONE

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The current state of world affairs is a complex and uncertain environment. Unlike during the Cold War, the world is not bi-polar, but unlike the last 16 years, counter-terrorism and the rise of non-state actors cannot be the sole focus of the U.S. security apparatus. The Gray Zone that face the U.S. government and its interests are as varied as they are numerous, however two major security challenges are the ongoing political warfare between the U.S. and its major state competitors and the GWOT. These security challenges are taxing resources and capacity for operations. Considering this resource constrained strategic environment, should the U.S. Government use the Global SOF Network under USSOCOM to conduct covert-like activities or would this be duplicative of the current capabilities and mandate of the CIA.

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

THE COVERT USE OF THE GLOBAL SPECIAL OPERATIONS NETWORK AND THE MILITARIZATION OF COVERT ACTION IN POLITICAL WARFARE AND THE GRAY ZONE by MAJ Jeffrey M. Nephew, 138 pages.

The current state of world affairs is a complex and uncertain environment. Unlike during the Cold War, the world is not bi-polar, but unlike the last 16 years, counter-terrorism and the rise of non-state actors cannot be the sole focus of the U.S. security apparatus. The Gray Zone that face the U.S. government and its interests are as varied as they are numerous, however two major security challenges are the ongoing political warfare between the U.S. and its major state competitors and the GWOT. These security challenges are taxing resources and capacity for operations. Considering this resource constrained strategic environment, should the U.S. Government use the Global SOF Network under USSOCOM to conduct covert-like activities or would this be duplicative of the current capabilities and mandate of the CIA.

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ACRONYMS

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
SOF	Special Operations Forces
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command
UW	Unconventional Warfare

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected and globalized, states face increasingly complex and asymmetric challenges. These challenges present an operational environment for the government and military that is best characterized as something between war and peace. While the United States Congress has not declared war in 75 years, the U.S. has been in a near constant state of conflict with the Armed Forces being used abroad in 208 separate instances since the end of World War II in 1945. This "Gray Zone" or the space between war and peace is the current state of world affairs. The inhabitants of this space include terrorists, violent non-state actors, Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs), and a multitude of other hybrid threats or asymmetric challenges. These adversaries operate in the gray zone outside of declared war. In response the United States military has been taking up a greater role in preventing the escalation of these gray zone conflicts into full-scale war. The Special Operations community has responded by increasing their worldwide persistent presence with the Global SOF Network to achieve United States political warfare objectives. With its unique capabilities SOF can achieve political warfare objectives by unilaterally executing operations in a covert manner, or through and with indigenous personnel in politically sensitive or hostile environments.[1] The CIA however is traditionally responsible for

[1] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-05, *Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014).

covert action programs conducted by the U.S. Therefore, should the President militarize covert action and allow SOF to execute these activities without CIA involvement or oversight? Does SOF action to clandestinely preparing environments for future conflict prior to the start of conflict compromise the capabilities of SOF by reducing international trust? Are the strategic effects of the CIA complemented by the tactical operations of the Global SOF network? These questions lead to the purpose of this research as outlined below in the primary research question and five subordinate questions.

Research Questions

Primary Research Question: Is the expansion of the Global SOF Network to include covert-like activities duplicative of CIA covert action as a method of political warfare by the United States?

Sub-Research Question One: What is the "Global SOF Network”?

Sub-Research Question Two: What is political warfare in the current operating environment?

Sub-Research Question Three: What SOF capabilities can support political warfare by the U.S.?

Sub-Research Question Four: How does covert action support political warfare by the U.S.?

Sub-Research Question Five: What are the differences in capabilities and authorities between SOF and the CIA that create gaps for SOF focus and application?

Assumptions

To be relevant this research makes several basic assumptions. First, the United States government will continue conducting covert activities in support of its national objectives and strategy. Second, the United States will continue to look to operations other than war to prevent and deter future large-scale war. Third, the United States is capable and willing to engage in political warfare and covert activities to protect its interests overseas and influence events throughout the world. Fourth, the Special Operations community has a desire or willingness to conduct covert activities.

Definitions

Covert Action (as defined in U.S. Statute): an activity or activities of the United States Government to influence political, economic, or military conditions abroad, where it is intended that the role of the United States Government will not be apparent or acknowledged publicly, but does not include:

1. Activities the primary purpose of which is to acquire intelligence, traditional counterintelligence activities, traditional activities to improve or maintain the operational security of United States Government programs, or administrative activities;
2. Traditional diplomatic or military activities or routine support to such activities;
3. Traditional law enforcement activities conducted by United States Government law enforcement agencies or routine support to such activities; or

4. Activities to provide routine support to the overt activities (other than activities described in paragraph (1), (2), or (3)) of other United States Government agencies abroad.

The term "Covert Action" is used to describe the covert operations of the CIA while "covert-like activities" or "covert activities" are used in this thesis to describe operations conducted by other governmental agencies and departments such as the DoD and its subordinate SOF.

Clandestine operation: An operation sponsored or conducted by governmental departments or agencies in such a way as to assure secrecy or concealment. Clandestine operations seek to conceal that the operation, action or event occurred with no outwardly observed effects.

Unconventional Warfare: Activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area.

Foreign Internal Defense: U.S. activities that support a host nation's (HN's) internal defense and development strategy and program designed to protect against subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to their internal security, and stability.

Scope

This research will provide an understanding of the capabilities and limitations of the Global SOF Network to execute covert-like activities. Specifically, it will look into the legal aspects of such activities within the current United States laws and policies and the international community's rules and norms of behavior for military or civilian

personnel. It will also provide a context by examining the current operational environment and the use of covert activities to support political warfare and the evolution of such activities from the Cold War era to present day. This research will also examine the capability and authority gaps between the CIA and the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) for conducting covert-like activities.

Limitations

To maintain this thesis at the unclassified level, all research will be open-source. This may ultimately limit the breadth and depth of analysis as covert activities are inherently secretive. This limitation is compounded by a restriction on time as this research must be completed by May 2017.

Delimitations

This research will remain at the strategic level focusing on the use of SOF as a strategic asset conducting tactical operations. Additionally, this research will be limited temporally to the period from World War II to the present. Finally, this research will be limited to an examination of the use of SOF as a military tool of covert activities rather than an overall discussion of the benefits or challenges of covert activity in and of itself.

Significance

With its forward presence across the world, the Global SOF network has the potential to provide capabilities to support political warfare, possibly in the realm of covert activities. This research will provide a deeper understanding of the legal, operational and strategic ramifications of the use of SOF to conduct covert activities

campaigns to achieve these political objectives. It will also consider whether there exist gaps in the current capabilities of the CIA that SOF can fill.

Organization

Following this introductory chapter will be a literature review. This literature review will cover the current literature on the concepts of the "Gray Zone" and "Political Warfare" followed by a review of the literature about the Global SOF Network and whether SOF or the CIA should be in the lead of covert activities. Chapter 3 will explain the research methodology with an introduction of the case studies and their significance to this research. Chapter 4 will begin with a brief history of SOF and the CIA and an outline of their current capabilities followed by a detailed discussion and analysis of each case study in turn and in comparison to each other. Chapter 5 will conclude the analysis of this research and if supported by the evidence will offer recommendations for the future.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical to understanding the current use of Special Operations Forces in covert-like activities is an understanding of the strategic setting that the United States Government is operating in and how challenges are being addressed to reach the goals of the United States. From this strategic level stage-setting, further exploration is possible into the specific ways and means the USG can secure its national interests. Therefore this study will begin with a review of the literature and theory of the "Gray Zone" to set up an interpretation of the current strategic environment. The literature review will then center on the concept of political warfare within the Gray Zone including a discussion of covert applications. The literature review will then provide some historical background on the CIA and Special Operations and their shared origins. Next, within the framework of political warfare, the literature review will then focus on the current capabilities and legal authorities of each entity. The review will then focus on the Global SOF Network and how it is currently being used within political warfare. Finally, the literature review will explore the current strategy of the U.S. covert action program and the literature discussing whether SOF or the CIA should have lead.

The Gray Zone

The Gray Zone is a relatively new term used to define an old scenario in which nations are in constant competition with each other.[2] This competition exists along a spectrum from the peaceful interaction between nations such as the United States and some of her closest international allies like the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Australia described as the "White Side" of the competition to total war between nations represented on the "Black Side" of the spectrum. Between these polar opposites is the "Gray Zone," the spectrum of limited war which is depicted in figure 1.

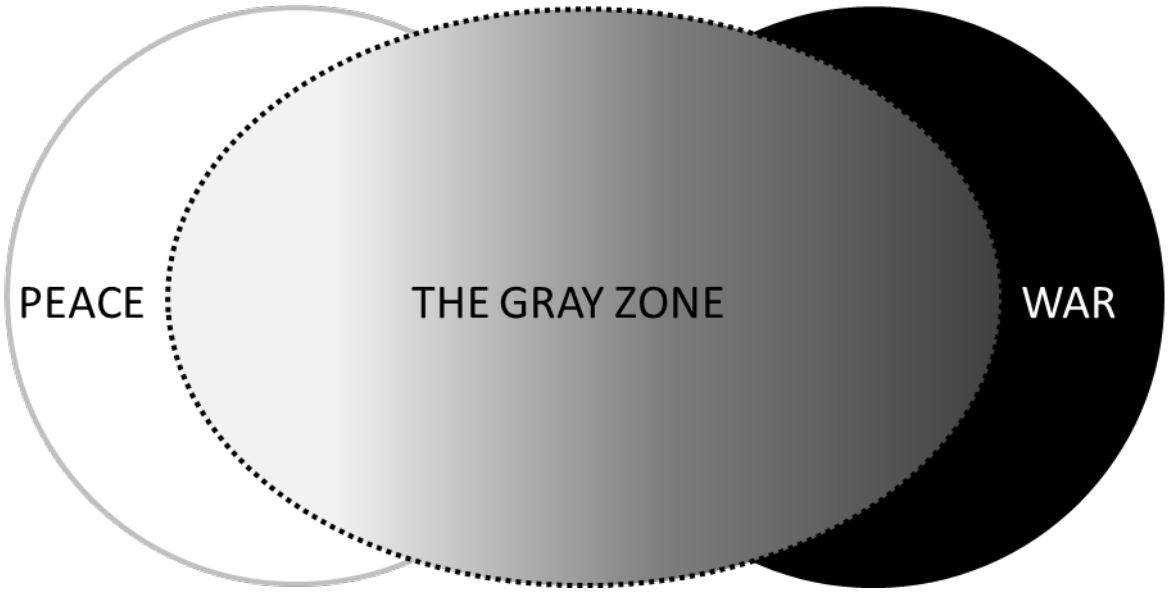

Figure 1. The Gray Zone

Source: Derived from Philip Kapusta, "The Gray Zone," *Special Warfare Magazine* 28, no. 4 (October-December 2015): 22, accessed October 10, 2016, http://www.soc.mil/SWCS/SWmag/archive/SW2804/October%202015%20Special%20Warfare.pdf.

[2] Philip Kapusta, "The Gray Zone," *Special Warfare Magazine* 28, no. 4 (October-December 2015): 18-25, accessed October 10, 2016, http://www.soc.mil/SWCS/SWmag/archive/SW2804/October%202015%20Special%20Warfare.pdf.

One group of senior military leaders defines the "Gray Zone" as "security challenges which are competitive interactions among and within state and non-state actors that fall between the traditional war and peace duality"[3] It "is characterized by intense political, economic, informational, and military competition more fervent in nature than steady-state diplomacy."[4]

This definition is not all-encompassing and there is an active debate about the Gray Zone and what it might encompass. The concept "has generated significant attention and controversy recently, within both the U.S. government and the broader strategic studies community."[5] One of the most controversial aspects of the concept is determining which conflicts to include under the term "Gray Zone conflict." While some theorists lump all irregular or unconventional conflicts under this umbrella term others feel that this renders the concept overly ambiguous and thus analytically useless.[6] Michael Mazaar and others contend that the defining features of the gray-zone conflict are "three elements—rising revisionist intent, a form of strategic gradualism, and

[3] Kapusta, 22.

[4] Joseph Votel et al., "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 80 (1st Quarter 2016): 102, accessed October 10, 2016, http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-80/jfq-80_101-109_Votel-et-al.pdf.

[5] Hal Brands, "Paradoxes of the Gray Zone," Foreign Policy Research Institute, February 2016, accessed December 2016, http://www.fpri.org/article/2016/02/paradoxes-gray-zone, 2.

[6] Ibid., 3.

unconventional tools" and that these elements "are creating a new approach to the pursuit of aggressive aims, a new standard form of conflict."[7]

Another aspect of "gray zone conflict" that is under debate is whether it is limited to military conflicts, as in Russia's use of military force to redraw the border with Georgia, annex Crimea, and invade Ukraine.[8] However, "it is also worth remembering that some of the most important tools in addressing these challenges are essentially non-military in nature."[9] While the military defense of the U.S. is certainly a large piece of the puzzle, as a deterrent if nothing else, the other elements of national power-Diplomatic, Informational, and Economic-still play invaluable roles in defeating gray zone adversaries by countering their coercive, incremental approaches and reducing their local or regional dominance.[10]

For the purpose of this research the following definition will be used: the Gray Zone is an area of inter-and extra-state relations wherein the steady-state competition is escalated to include activity that is coercive and aggressive in nature without crossing the

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[7] Michael Mazaar, "Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict" (Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA, 2015), 4.

[8] David Barno and Nora Bensahel, "Fighting and Winning in the 'Gray Zone'," *War on the Rocks*, 2015, accessed September 29, 2016, http://warontherocks.com/2015/05/fighting-and-winning-in-the-gray-zone/, 2.

[9] Brands, 5.

[10] Alexander Lanoszka, "Russian Hybrid Warfare and Extended Deterrence in Eastern Europe," *International Affairs* 92, no. 1 (2016): 189-190, accessed January 10, 2017, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/ia/INTA92_1_09_Lanoszka.pdf.

threshold of violence into open war.[11] These activities include the use by state and non-state competitors of asymmetric, hybrid, irregular, and unconventional military and non-military means used to positively affect the international status-quo to promote their agenda, build local or regional dominance or upend the international political or economic order.[12]

The competitions and the challenges within the Gray Zone are unique but "share three common characteristics: hybridity, menace to defense/military convention, and risk-confusion."[13] Hybridity is characterized by the use of multiple means including military or not, covert or overt. The Gray Zone is a menace to defense convention because it does not conform to a linear spectrum of conflict. Risk-confusion refers to the idea that action or inaction in response each offer high risk.

International competition is not new, however the increasingly complex globalized environment of the world today has created competition that is marked by rapid fluctuations and instabilities as nations use tailorable levels of force and influence to accomplish objectives.[14] Specifically, in the past a nation would field an army to pursue its objectives. Nations have a plethora of options available to them across the elements of national power to try to achieve their national objectives and interests.

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[11] Brands, 2.

[12] Barno, 2.

[13] Nathan P. Freier, "Outplayed: Regaining Strategic Initiative in the Gray Zone" (Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College Carlisle, PA, 2016), xiii (Executive Summary).

[14] Brands, 2.

Instead of launching a full-scale military campaign, a nation or non-state actor can instead conduct a cyber-attack to expose the secrets of an international company and use them to exploit weakness. Nations can literally build new islands in the middle of the sea to expand their international influence and gain the security and operational reach they desire. This current state of affairs presents massive challenges to the United States and its allies as partners can quickly become adversaries as political or physical interests change and methods of competition increase. Therefore, as an answer to the complex environment characterized by the Gray Zone, the United States and many of its major state-competitors have adopted a strategy of political warfare.

Political Warfare

Political warfare as a method is not new as writers such as Sun Tzu described its effects: "To win a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the highest excellence; the highest excellence is to subdue the enemy's army without fighting at all."[15] While ancient in its origins, the term political warfare was originally coined by the British government during World War II to categorize the propaganda campaign the United Kingdom was conducting against Nazi Germany.[16] The concept is still under debate as a specific definition can be difficult to interpret given the complex environment and limitless methods of execution.

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[15] Sun Wu and Samuel Griffith, *Sun Tzu The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1971).

[16] Charles Cruickshank,. *The Fourth Arm: Psychological Warfare 1938-1945* (London, UK: Davis-Poynter, 1977), 69.

In a memorandum to the National Security Council, George Kennan in 1948 categorized political warfare as "the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives. Such operations are both overt and covert."[17] Kennan's point of view on political warfare is echoed in Max Boot et al. *Policy Innovation Memorandum No.33* and the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) White Paper *SOF Support to Political Warfare* that both postulate that "rather than a binary opposition between 'war' and 'peace', the conduct of international relations is characterized by continuously evolving combinations of collaboration, conciliation, confrontations, and conflict."[18] These "evolving combinations" constitute political warfare. Political warfare includes the "spectrum of activities associated with diplomatic and economic engagement, Security Sector Assistance (SSA), novel forms of Unconventional Warfare (UW), and Information and Influence Activities (IIA)." "Their related activities . . . are woven together into a whole-of-government framework for comprehensive effect."[19] Boot et al also agree with Kennan[20] in arguing for a specific organization and trained specialists to plan, coordinate,

[17] George F. Kennan, "On Organizing Political Warfare," Wilson Center, April 30, 1948, accessed September 23, 2016, http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320, 1.

[18] United States Army Special Operations Command, "SOF Support to Political Warfare" (White Paper, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, NC, 2015), 1.

[19] Ibid., 2.

[20] Kennan, 1-2.

and synchronize political warfare, as it seems to be the current overall strategy that the United States and its adversaries are constantly and continuously engaged in.[21]

Some, particularly Frank Hoffman, eschew the term political warfare, saying that it is an oxymoron. Hoffman argues that if one subscribes to Clausewitzian theory that "all wars are political," how is political warfare different? Although Kennan and Boot incorporate into the theory of political warfare all elements of national power-diplomatic, information, military, and economic means- according to Hoffman, in doing so, they define a concept that is no longer just "political." Hoffman also contends that if political warfare is limited to everything "short of war" then it is not "warfare" as warfare inherently implies active violence and force. Hoffman argues that the term "unconventional conflict" would be the most descriptive of the conditions described and would be more appropriate. Hoffman's conceptualization would take the modern definition of "unconventional warfare" described in chapter 1 of this research, but expand it from a narrow vision of warfare to include other non-violent aspects state interaction.[22] The USASOC Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategy (ARIS) project echoes Hoffman's sentiment. While focused on the application of unconventional warfare by

[21] Max Boot, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, and Michael Doran, "Political Warfare," *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 28, 2013, accessed September 29, 2016, http://www.cfr.org/wars-and-warfare/political-warfare/p30894, 3.

[22] Frank Hoffman, "On Not-So-New Warfare: Political Warfare vs Hybrid Threats," *War on the Rocks*, July 2014, accessed October 10, 2016, https://warontherocks.com/2014/07/on-not-so-new-warfare-political-warfare-vs-hybrid-threats/.

modern SOF, ARIS uses the intellectual framework of political warfare and/or unconventional conflict to provide a mental model for synthesis.[23]

Political warfare has also received attention in attempts to define the strategic threats from several state adversaries to the United States. The political warfare campaigns of Russia, China, and Iran are generally referred to as Hybrid Warfare, Unrestricted Warfare, and Asymmetric Warfare, respectfully. While the means and methods of each are different, the overall ends and ways are similar. Each nation is looking to influence other nations and non-state actors to support their strategic objectives through influence and coercion.[24] The above concepts of political warfare are similar to the writings of Russian chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov. Originally writing in *Military-Industrial Kurier* Gerasimov lays out some of the fundamentals of "masked warfare."[25]

> Wars are no longer declared and, having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template. . . . The role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness. . . . Long-distance, contactless actions against the enemy are becoming the main means of achieving combat and operational goals. The defeat of the enemy's objects is conducted throughout the entire depth of his territory. The differences between strategic, operational, and tactical levels, as well as between offensive and defensive operations, are being erased.[26]

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[23] United States Army Special Operations Command, "Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies: Undergrounds in Insurgent, Revolutionary, and Resistance Warfare," 2013, accessed October 10, 2016, http://www.soc.mil/ARIS/ARIS.html.

[24] Mazaar, 80.

[25] Hoffman, 3.

[26] Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science is in the Foresight," *Military Review* (January-February 2013): 23-29, trans. Robert Coalson, June 21, 2014, originally published in *Military-Industrial Kurrier* (February 27, 2013), accessed January 10, 2017,

This research is not intended to solve the debate about political warfare, but an understanding of it is required to provide a framework of the strategy of the United States to prevent or respond to "Gray Zone conflicts." To this end, and based off of the literature, the term political warfare is acceptable for the purposes of this research and is defined as the strategic use of parts and portions of the elements of national power and the means at a nation's disposal to achieve its political and national objectives. These elements include diplomatic, informational, military, and economic means that are characterized by overt and covert-like activities meant to influence and coerce other international entities into active or passive support of U.S. national objectives. This strategy exists as an answer to the "Gray Zone" and it is therefore characterized by force, if not violence, and an adversarial relationship between actors. In practice this theory is not clear cut but does offer come generalizations that are helpful for understanding.

Figure 2 offers a visual depiction of this theory in practice showing the split between covert and overt actions undertaken by the CIA, SOF and Department of State within the Gray Zone with the Department of State being exclusively overt, the CIA being nearly completely covert, and SOF being somewhere in between. The internal circles are the different types of actions undertaken by each to address the four elements of national power: diplomatic, economic, information and military. This chart is derived from the information found within the literature review and is provided solely as a visual interpretation of the political warfare definition being used in this research.

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http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20160228_art008.pdf, 24.

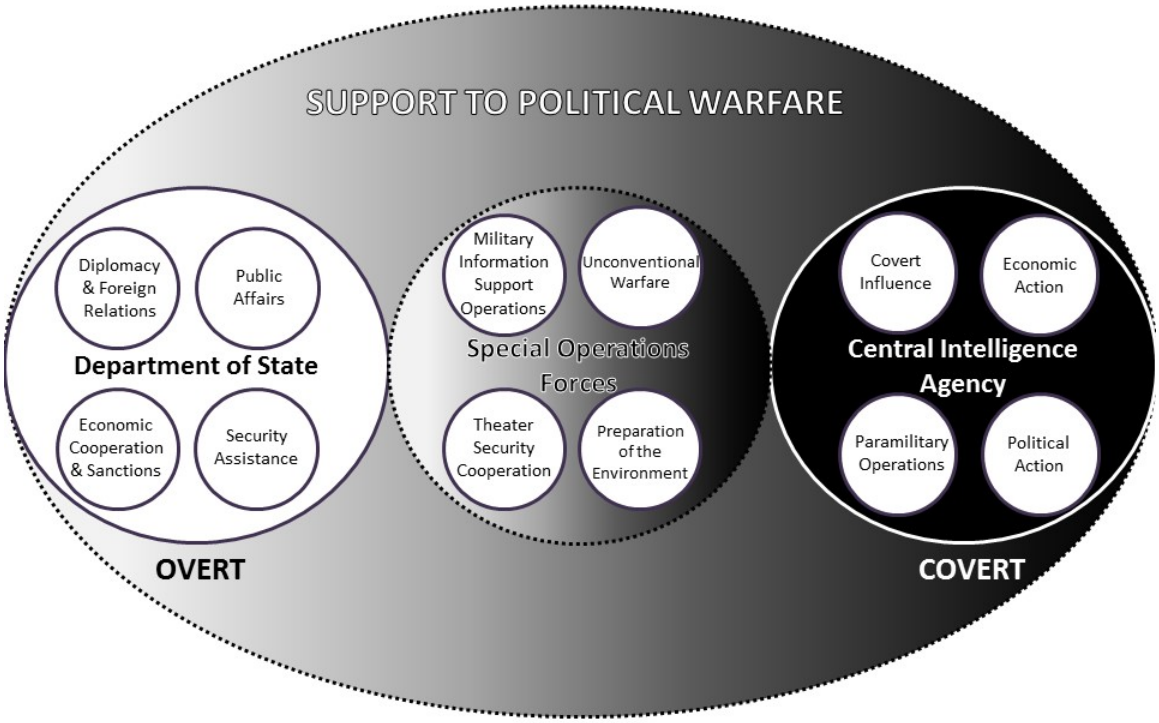

Figure 2. Visual Depiction of political warfare

Source: Created by author.

Global SOF Network

Seeking to expand its role in ongoing conflicts and in regions not currently engaged in war, USSOCOM developed the concept of the Global SOF Network. It has the stated overall goal of increasing the interoperability between U.S. and foreign SOF and availability of U.S. SOF to military and civilian leadership by operationalizing

foreign SOF.[27] Foreign SOF could then identify and respond to crises in an effort to prevent and deter large-scale conflict and/or disruption to the international order. U.S. SOF could be introduced later to support and defend the national interests of the U.S. through small footprints and low-level presence, a more responsive organization, with increased partner capacity.[28]

An article from 2012 and a Congressional Research Service report from 2013 raise several concerns about the current and future role of SOF, and specifically the Global SOF Network. Linda Robinson, in her article "The Future of Special Operations" contends that since 9/11, the U.S. Government has focused too much on the kinetic "direct approach" to counter-terrorism with lethal raids and drone airstrikes and not enough on the "indirect approach." The author believes that despite "high-level rhetorical support for the indirect approach, when it comes to funding and staffing, the special operations community and two presidential administrations have prioritized the direct approach for the past decade. The resulting unilateral actions have sometimes disrupted imminent threats. But their positive effects have rarely proved permanent, and they have often complicated longer-term efforts."[29] While the indirect approach is far from flawless, it provides "the prospect of lasting benefits with a smaller footprint and lower

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[27] Thomas Szayna and William Welser, *Developing and Assessing Options for the Global SOF Network* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2013), 1.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Linda Robinson, "The Future of Special Operations: Beyond Kill and Capture," *Council on Foreign Affairs*, November 2012, accessed January 10, 2017, http://www.cfr.org/special-operations/future-special-operations/p29418, 2.

cost."[30] While the indirect approach that Admiral William H. McRaven, former Commander of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) dubbed the Global SOF Network can be and has been very successful, as was evident in Special Forces activities in Colombia and the Philippines, it has its own risk namely that in navigating the internal politics of foreign governments, "the United States must constantly assess whether special operations partnerships with non-U.S. forces are, on balance, advancing or compromising U.S. interests" specifically, "abusive practices or policies."[31] Robinson cited recent SOF involvement with the Yemeni government that later faced significant allegations of criminal behavior. Finally, Robinson issues recommendations to the U.S. government that it should provide more authority to plan and pay for these long term indirect campaigns separate from the current yearly defense authorization act allowances. This would ensure the long-term viability of partner forces and their support to U.S. national interests.[32]

A report published by the Congressional Research Service in 2013 examined the proposed Global SOF Network, specifically its authorities and budget. It outlined several constraints on USSOCOM that could limit the expansive nature of the strategy, thereby restricting its effect. A 2013 Joint Chiefs of Staff planning order directed USSOCOM to "develop a detailed campaign plan for the Global SOF Network, further directing that the Global SOF Network be 'resource neutral,' suggesting that if [the] Global SOF Network

[30] Ibid., 3.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 4.

is established, USSOCOM must find funds elsewhere."[33] The report also states that "Congress has ongoing concerns primarily with the "structures" aspect of the Global SOF Network and also the necessity of such entities as the Regional SOF Coordination Centers."[34] These Regional SOF Coordination Centers would be an additional military body in select nations worldwide to synchronize the efforts of SOF regionally. The nature of these concerns relates to the redundancy of systems as regional coordination centers are seen as unnecessary considering the forward presence of U.S. Embassies and other agencies that can facilitate power projection through the "indirect approach." Redundancy is a concern for the conduct and oversight of covert action as to whether the CIA should maintain its leadership role or pass covert action to SOF in consideration of the current strategic environment.

Covert Action: SOF vs. CIA

Following the attacks of 9/11, there has been discussion over whether the CIA has been overly tasked. Some argue that the CIA is incapable of providing timely and accurate information to national security policy-makers while simultaneously being involved in multiple operations across the globe.[35] The 9/11 commission recommended that:

> The CIA should retain responsibility for the direction and execution of clandestine and covert operations, as assigned by the relevant national intelligence

[33] Andrew Feickert, *U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, updated April 2015), 14.

[34] Ibid., 15.

[35] Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008), 12.

> center and authorized by the National Intelligence Director and the president. This would include propaganda, renditions, and nonmilitary disruption. [The Commission] believes, however, that one important area of responsibility should change. Recommendation: Lead responsibility for directing and executing paramilitary operations, whether clandestine or covert, should shift to the Defense Department. There it should be consolidated with the capabilities for training, direction, and execution of such operations already being developed in the Special Operations Command.[36]

They made this recommendation based on two findings. First, they found that the CIA's performance in paramilitary operations prior to 9/11 was unsatisfactory as they focused on proxies that were unreliable. Secondly, they determined that the CIA and SOF programs were redundant. To counter this redundancy, each should focus on their respective strengths, i.e. the CIA should focus on intelligence collection and analysis and other forms of covert action while SOF should continue secret foreign military training. Recognizing the generally superior flexibility found in the CIA's operations branch, they further recommended integrating the CIA's experts into the SOF execution of covert paramilitary operations.[37]

While many of the recommendations set forth in the 9/11 commission report were carried out in Public Law 110-53, Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007, the above recommendation was not. "Opposition by the Pentagon, the Intelligence Community, and the Bush Administration undoubtedly

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[36] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2004), accessed January 10, 2017, https://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf, 415.

[37] Ibid., 416.

affected the congressional response to the 9/11 Commission's recommendation."[38] This opposition was relayed to the Congress by the Director of the CIA.[39] While no significant decision has been made on the issue, the "blurring of the lines between DoD clandestine operations and CIA intelligence-gathering operations"[40] has piqued Congressional interest to ensure proper oversight of DoD operations as "the lines defining mission and authorities with regard to covert action are less than clear."[41]

In spite of this response by both the CIA and DoD, others continue to suggest that the CIA needs to hand over covert action to another entity, specifically the DOD and Special Operations community. MAJ Vincent Bramble stipulates that it is a question of resources. "The CIA is truly not up to the task from a resource perspective to conduct effective operations (covert and paramilitary) to the level and scale required with respect to the GWOT [Global War on Terrorism]."[42] Bramble further states that "the [Special Forces] community has superior numbers of resources (personnel and monetary) as opposed to the CIA."[43] While the author acknowledges that the CIA has greater

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[38] Richard Best and Andrew Feickert, *Special Operations Forces (SOF) and CIA Paramilitary Operations: Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2005, updated 2009), 4.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., 6.

[41] Marshall Curtis Erwin, *Covert Action: Legislative Background and Possible Policy Questions* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, April 2013), 5.

[42] Vincent Paul Bramble, "Covert Action Lead-Central Intelligence Agency or Special Forces" (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 2007), 38.

[43] Ibid.

experience and capability to conduct covert action, as well as the political wherewithal to manage the reporting requirements, he believes that with the CIA's initial assistance, SOF can and should take over all covert action for the foreseeable future for the conduct of the GWOT.[44]

Havliland Smith suggests that the CIA no longer be responsible for or authorized to conduct covert action but offers a different perspective and different reasons. He contends that traditional espionage, the true role of the CIA, is overall low-risk. "When actually exposed, such operations usually result, at worst, in the expulsion of our officer, a testy response from the target country, and icy relations for a usually manageable period of time."[45] When covert action, specifically political action "goes wrong or gets exposed, particularly if it involves regime change, the results can have virtually endless negative impact."[46] Smith contends that the agency as a whole suffers in their ability to place intelligence assets where they need to be to gather intelligence, if people are overall uneasy with the potential for covert action blowback. Smith mentions finite resources as a concern but believes that the associated risk of covert action requires that it be separated from espionage. Thus preventing our international relations from becoming soured by covert action exposure and blowout.

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[44] Ibid., 38-45.

[45] Havliland Smith, "Intelligence Collection and Covert Action," American Diplomacy, March 2009, accessed February 17, 2017, http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2009/0103/comm/smith_intel.html, 6.

[46] Ibid.

Summary

This literature review first examined and offered useable definitions of the gray zone and political warfare. Following that it discussed the Global SOF Network and the current challenges surrounding it. The literature review continued by reviewing some of the pertinent literature on covert action and whether SOF or the CIA should be the lead agency for its execution. Through the literature review, it is evident there is significant discussion of both the "Gray Zone" and "political warfare" as strategic concepts. There is also literature and a debate about whether the CIA needs to pass the conduct of covert action off to the SOF community. This research will attempt to link the covert action of the CIA along with the covert-like activities of Special Operations, to the current resurgence of political warfare, within the context of "Gray Zone" conflicts and compare them to historical precedent found in the case studies. The following chapter will outline the research methodology for building a model of analysis to answer the posed research questions.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Purpose

This study will attempt to answer the research questions in three stages. First, to define the strategic environment of the Gray Zone and current environment in which political warfare occurs. Second, to determine whether SOF capabilities would be complementary rather than merely additive to the overall political warfare campaign especially given the current fiscally restrictive environment. And third, contingent upon the results of the data collection and analysis, to develop a recommendation as to the use of the Global SOF Network to plan, execute and synchronize covert-like activities to support political warfare objectives.

Research Questions

Primary Research Question: Is the expansion of the Global SOF Network to include covert-like activities duplicative of CIA covert action as a method of political warfare by the United States?

Sub-Research Question One: What is the "Global SOF Network”?

Sub-Research Question Two: What is political warfare in the current operating environment?

Sub-Research Question Three: What SOF capabilities can support political warfare by the U.S.?

Sub-Research Question Four: How does covert action support political warfare by the U.S.?

Sub-Research Question Five: What are the differences in capabilities and authorities between SOF and the CIA that create gaps for SOF focus and application?

Methodology

For this study, qualitative methods will be used to examine the historical and contemporary uses of SOF and covert activities. It will begin with an introduction into the history of both SOF and the CIA, concluding with a comparison of their current capabilities. This section will help answer sub-research questions three through five. Included within their capabilities will be a discussion of the founding of the Global SOF Network and its current status, which will answer sub-research question one. From there, it will transition into a discussion of covert action and activities to provide a strong understanding of what it is, is not, and what is generally involved to further answer sub-research question four. Continuing with covert action, this research will then examine national and international laws and norms of behavior in regards to covert-like activities to develop an understanding of the ramifications of SOF versus CIA use to answer sub-research question five. It will then discuss Joint and Army SOF doctrine specifically related to unconventional warfare (UW) and influence operations (IO) to determine the doctrinal capabilities of SOF - not necessarily their current physical capacity - to add the conduct of covert-like activities. UW and IO will be closely examined because they are mission-types closely related to the paramilitary and covert influence activities within the CIA's covert action. This section further answers sub-research question four. From this framework, this research will address the three selected case studies individually, then in a comparative analysis. Within this analysis will be a comparison between each of the case studies and contemporary strategic and operational settings. Coupled with the rough

definition within chapter 2, this analysis will answer sub-research question two in more detail providing a historical context to state interactions within the Cold War era in comparison to the environment of today.

The case studies will be used to determine whether a historical precedent exists to support the use of SOF as a persistent presence across the globe in support of not only overt military-to-military networks, but also the operationalization of those overt networks for covert-like activities. The first case study will examine the actions and activities of the Combined Command Reconnaissance Activities, Korea (CCRAK) which was the overall coordination command for covert activities against North Korea during the Korean War. The CIA worked as the Joint Activities Commission Korea (JACK) and the DoD under the 8240th Army Unit or "White Tigers." This case study will provide a war-time example of covert activities to compare and contrast between the CIA and DoD in how they conducted covert campaigns. The next case study will include the use of SOF and their indigenous networks and contacts to execute the Phoenix program and Operation Switchback as a part of the CIA initiative to disrupt the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War. This case study will focus on the interplay of the CIA and SOF to conduct covert activities and the success, failures or implications of this specific covert program. The final case study will be an examination of the CIA covert action program and its SOF support in El Salvador. This case study will again focus on the interplay of the CIA and SOF particularly in regards to the paramilitary aspect of covert action. These case studies span the conflict spectrum, from major state-on-state war (Korea) through a combination of state-on-state war and guerrilla warfare (Vietnam) to support to counterinsurgency (El Salvador).

The analysis of each case will be conducted the same way to allow for cross-case comparison. The primary similarity and the overall criteria for their selection was that they involve the conduct of covert action or activities by both the CIA and SOF in an environment that, according to the definitions derived from the literature in chapter 2, are characteristic of the Gray Zone and political warfare. After an introduction of each, including a brief explanation of the design of the covert action programs, this research will compare and contrast the strategic and operational settings of each, in terms of where they are comparatively in the Gray Zone and political warfare. It will then discuss the specific roles and missions of the CIA and SOF. The case studies will conclude with an analysis of the interactions between the two and whether they were connected and supportive or not and if so, how.

From the individual analysis of each case, this research will then conduct a cross-case comparison, adding the contemporary environment, as identified in chapter 2 and chapter 4 as an additional "case." Table 1 below depicts the cross-case methodology.

Table 1. Model for Case Study Analysis

Case Study	Strategic Setting	Operational Setting	CIA Role	SOF Role	Interactions analysis
Korean War					
Phoenix Program					
El Salvador					
Contemporary Environment					

Source: Created by author.

The strategic setting will define where along the spectrum of conflict the particular case study exists and whether it is within the "Gray Zone" of state-to-state interactions or not. The strategic setting will help to provide a context to the reader of the historical era and how it compares to the current operating environment. This will begin to answer sub-research question two.

The operational setting analysis will determine the specific case's support to political warfare. All three cases occurred within the U.S. policy of containment of communism and the Soviet Union, however the manner of that containment and the political emphasis within each will help answer sub-research questions two through four.

The sections on CIA and SOF roles will clearly define the part each element played in that specific campaign and how it supported the overall U.S. strategy or effort. These roles will continue to help answer questions two through four and begin to answer question five.

Finally, the interactions analysis will discuss how the CIA and SOF interacted throughout the conduct of that particular campaign. Their interactions will answer sub-research question five and begin to answer the primary research question by giving a historical context to potentially duplicative efforts between the CIA and military and whether that redundancy was experienced in the past and if so, the effect it had on the overall U.S. campaign.

From the answers to the sub-research questions, chapter 5 will provide and present a theoretical approach to the current environment and the application of covert action and activities in answer to the primary research question (Is the expansion of the Global SOF Network to include covert-like activities duplicative of CIA covert action as

a method of political warfare by the United States?) contingent upon the results of analysis in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the shared beginnings of the Special Operations community and Central Intelligence Agency during and following World War II. It will then examine the first few decades of each as they continued to build and operate throughout the world in support of U.S. national interests until the chapter will reach the present and discuss the current capabilities and modus operandi of each. Next it will discuss the Global SOF Network, its establishment and perceived role in support of the USSOCOM mission to counter-terrorism worldwide. It will then provide an analysis of the current status of covert action and covert-like activities within the United States legal system and international law and norms of behavior. It will then offer a discussion of several current SOF activities including unconventional warfare, preparation of the environment, and influence operations comparing these to the CIA covert action types of paramilitary operations and covert influence. From this will be the historical presentation and analysis of the three case studies presented chronologically beginning with the Korean War, progressing to the Vietnam War, and finally ending with the U.S. support to the El Salvador counter-insurgency program. The chapter will conclude with a comparative analysis based off of chapter 3 table 1, according to the five identified headings and their relationship to the current environment. This analysis will provide answers to the five sub-research questions identified.

The Origins of SOF and the CIA

Special Operations and the CIA have a shared story that begins prior to the declaration of war by the United States against Japan in December 1941. The predecessors to SOF and the CIA were both the brainchild of William J. Donovan, who was initially assigned to "fact-find" about the British intelligence system. As they were in the throes of World War II against Nazi Germany and hopeful for United States involvement, the British happily obliged, confirming U.S. policy-makers' fears that the U.S. government as a whole was woefully unprepared for war in terms of intelligence collection and analysis capability.[47] Therefore, President Roosevelt assigned Donovan as the Director of the Office of the Coordinator of Information (OCI) in July 1941. Through Donovan's work, the OCI was replaced by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in July 1942 with Donovan at the helm. The OSS was tasked with the collection and analysis of strategic information of intelligence value to support the war effort.[48] Within this initial charter, the organization of the OSS grew exponentially during the war and eventually incorporated activities and a structure beyond the scope of its initial charter and intelligence-based branches. These branches included Maritime operations, Morale operations, Operational groups, and Special Operations. While the intelligence groups were focused on the secret, or clandestine, collection of information of intelligence value and counter-intelligence activities, these operationally focused branches conducted

[47] Alfred H. Paddock, *U.S. Army Special Warfare: Its Origins* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

[48] Thomas K. Adams, *US Special Operations Forces in Action: The Challenge of Unconventional Warfare* (New York: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998).

subversion and sabotage operations working unilaterally or with and through surrogates.[49] During WWII the OSS was helped provide intelligence and direct, low-cost effects on German and Japanese forces and populations. However, in spite of the incredible organizational and institutional strides made during the war, following its conclusion, the OSS was disbanded in 1945.[50]

In 1947 President Truman signed the National Security Act of 1947 establishing, among other entities, the CIA. The CIA was and remains chartered under USC Title 50 with the collection of national foreign intelligence, counterintelligence and managing intelligence relationships and, following input later that year from the National Security Council, special activities known as covert action.[51] The four operations branches of the OSS mentioned above however were not initially part of the CIA core activities, instead being transferred to the Department of Defense, with the exception that the National Security Council in 1948 gave the CIA full responsibility for "assistance to underground resistance movements, guerillas, and refugee liberations groups… in threatened countries of the free world." However, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the "primary interest in guerilla warfare should be that of the CIA in peacetime and the National Military Establishment in wartime."[52] The Korean War offered an early opportunity for

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[49] Michael E. Haas, *In the Devil's Shadow: UN Special Operations during the Korean War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2000).

[50] Bramble, 14-20.

[51] Central Intelligence Agency, "CIA Vision, Mission, Ethos and Challenges," accessed January 10, 2017, https://www.cia.gov/about-cia/cia-vision-mission-values.

[52] Benjamin Schemmer and John Carney, *U.S. Special Operations Forces* (Tampa, FL: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 2003), 84.

both organizations under the Combined Command Reconnaissance Activities, Korea (CCRAK). The CIA worked as the Joint Activities Commission Korea (JACK) and the DoD under the 8240th Army Unit or "White Tigers." Both ran covert action against the North Koreans and Chinese but with a significant difference in focus and scope with the DoD conducting small unit raids and other special operations at the tactical and operational levels and the CIA executing political, economic and informational actions at the national and strategic levels.[53]

While the CIA continued their growth and development throughout the Cold War as a focal point of U.S. government political warfare capability and conducting espionage and other covert and clandestine operations, the burgeoning SOF within the DoD focused on doctrine, training and selection with the activation of the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne) in 1952 and the initial Navy Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) teams in 1961.[54] The Special Operations Group (SOG), a composite of the military special operations capability in Vietnam at the time, and the CIA worked to together to disrupt Viet Cong operations along the Ho Chi Min trail in covert activities in and out of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.[55] The Phoenix Program is one specific effort that the CIA directed and SOF supported that will be covered in depth during the case study review.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s with covert programs in Central and South America and Afghanistan the CIA owned and oversaw operations often with the support

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[53] Ben S. Malcolm, *White Tigers: My Secret War in North Korea* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2003), 130.

[54] Adams.

[55] Paddock.

of Special Forces operators at the tactical and operational levels providing training, advising, and assistance to paramilitary forces.

While the CIA was authorized in 1948 to conduct "covert activities" there was no statutory basis for what constituted "covert activities" until the National Security Act of 1991 (Public Law 102-88) established a specific definition of covert action, the approval process, and requirements for notification to Congress.[56] Military involvement in these covert-like activities involved an ad hoc reporting and authorization system as there was no central SOF command. This changed in 1986 with the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act (Public Law 99-661) which created the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) giving them control of Special Operations training and doctrine. Further, in 1987 Public Law 100-180 gave USSOCOM military department-like authority to man, train, equip and deploy Special Operations Forces[57] with these roles and responsibilities codified into law as part of Title 10, U.S. Code, and Section 167.[58] The bonds connecting the CIA and SOF appear to have only grown stronger during the current Global War on Terror as both operate to gather and analyze intelligence to conduct operations in support of the USG.

Current CIA Capabilities

Given the clandestine nature of its mission, the Central Intelligence Agency is inherently a secret organization. Its mission is to "Preempt threats and further U.S.

[56] Best and Feickert, 2.

[57] Schemmer, 139-140.

[58] Best and Feickert, 2.

national security objectives by collecting intelligence that matters, producing objective all-source analysis, conducting effective covert action as directed by the President, and safeguarding the secrets that help keep our Nation safe."[59] They accomplish this mission by identifying a national security problem or issue, or through guidance by the President or National Security Council, then looking for a way to collect information about the problem to support national objectives.[60] They use multiple means including open source intelligence, imagery intelligence, signals intelligence, and human intelligence. "After the information is collected, intelligence analysts pull together the relevant information from all available sources and assess what is happening, why it is happening, what might occur next, and what it means for U.S. interests. . . . Additionally, the CIA may also engage in covert action at the President's direction and in accordance with applicable law."[61]

While the primary mission of the CIA is human intelligence collection and national level all-source analysis, covert action gives the CIA the ability to affect the international situation with limited or delayed exposure of involvement by the USG. Covert action is broadly used to influence the internal mechanisms of a state, influence the opinion of members of a state, or to induce specific actions by the state.[62] Covert action is "active" and seeks to change the behavior of a target through means that are

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[59] Central Intelligence Agency.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Roy Godson, *Dirty Tricks or Trump Cards: US Covert Action and Counterintelligence* (Washington, DC: Brassey's Intelligence and National Security Library, 1995), 134.

unknown or at least unrecognized as being connected to the nation attempting to elicit that change.[63] Some types of covert action include: political actions, economic action, covert influence, and paramilitary operations.

What do these subcomponents of covert action compromise? Political actions are attempts by the USG to directly influence the political direction of other nations. These might include covertly supporting foreign political parties or supporting a coup d'état. These actions carry a great deal of risk as populations generally do not appreciate external interference in their internal political processes. Economic action is used to either artificially inflate or deflate an economy to either prop it up, or disrupt and render it defunct. Covert influence or "Black" propaganda is used to influence individuals or organizations. These influence campaigns can be conducted through various means to sway people as desired by the USG. Paramilitary operations are used to build groups of guerilla fighters to conduct specific actions at the behest of the USG. These guerillas are generally task oriented so they are created for one mission or series of missions, not necessarily built and kept "on the shelf." These modern missions are a direct derivation from the original capabilities desired by the USG in response to the beginning of the Cold War following WWII.

Following the start of the Cold War, the National Security Council published NSC Directive 10/2 in 1948. This directive was a direct response to the perceived and real threat of the Soviet Union and their use of covert means to spread communism. When the OSS was disbanded following WWII, so too did the U.S. capability to conduct

[63] Erwin, 5.

covert operations. Therefore, because they were already doing espionage and counter-espionage, the CIA was given the authority over covert "operations" (read "action") and primacy over it during times of peace. These operations were meant to complement the overt foreign relations carried out by the State Department. According to NSC 10/2,

> The Central Intelligence Agency is charged by the National Security Council with conducting espionage and counter-espionage operations abroad. It therefore seems desirable, for operational reasons, not to create a new agency for covert operations, but in time of peace to place the responsibility for them within the structure of the Central Intelligence Agency and correlate them with espionage and counter-espionage operations under the over-all control of the Director of Central Intelligence.[64]

As the proponent for covert action the CIA is directed to conduct covert action through presidential findings signed by the President of the United States. Congress provides oversight and funding. Traditionally, the CIA is the lead agent for covert action however the President may select whomever he desires or feels could best accomplish the desired objectives. The finding requirements are the same regardless due to Congressional investigations into covert activities including the Church and Pike Committees in the mid-1970s.

In 1974, Congress approved the Hughes-Ryan Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, which requires a Presidential finding for the expenditure of funds for covert action by the CIA. This amendment stipulated that the CIA and executive branch report their covert actions in a "timely fashion" to a total of six congressional committees. In 1980, this amendment was repealed and replaced by a statute that

[64] Office of the Historian, Department of State, "292. National Security Directive on Office of Special Projects, June 18, 1948." Department of State, accessed January 5, 2017, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945-50Intel/d292.

continued to require a presidential finding but changed the reporting requirements to two committees: the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, established in 1976, and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, established in 1977. This statute also stipulated that if necessary, as constrained by time or circumstance, the President may limit notice to the ranking members of the Committees now known as the "Gang of Eight." In 1984 and 1986, additional requirements were placed on the CIA if the sale of "significant military equipment" was to occur during an operation. Fall-out from the Iran-contra affair during the Reagan administration led to additional oversight, first with President Reagan's National Security Decision Directive 286, which prohibited retroactive presidential findings and required that those findings be written, and second, Public Law 102-88, the current statute governing the conduct of covert action that has remained virtually unchanged since 1991.[65]

While the CIA is the lead and their policies and regulations take priority, it is recognized within the U.S. government that the personnel resources of the CIA are finite and that omniscience is impossible even with modern technology. Therefore, the CIA must be selective about the number and size of its covert action programs so as not to overextend its capacity. If a covert action program is needed and is beyond the singular capability of the CIA, the president is authorized to use another department or agency as Title 50 stipulates and Executive Order 12333 outlines very specifically.

[65] Erwin, 1-2.

Covert Action

Chapter 1 of this thesis provides the definition of covert action found in U.S. Title Code 50 Section 3093. Nonetheless, it is important to explore the current application of covert action beyond the definitional parameters. There have been small and incremental changes to the definition of and reporting requirements for covert action since its initial authorization in the Defense Authorization Act of 1947 and grant of execution authority to the CIA by the National Security Council in 1948, however the overall intent remains to provide the executive and its departments, agencies, and entities the ability to wage "non-attributable" political warfare against the enemies of the United States and the adversaries to its national interests. These covert methods are intended to complement the overall foreign policy of the United States as executed by the President and the Department of State.

While Title 50 authorizes other departments, agencies, or entities and their employees, contractors, or contract agents to conduct covert action, due to the significant political risk involved, the requirement for Congressional oversight, the means to conceal funding, knowledge of international law, including the Geneva Convention, and operator training, the CIA is generally accepted as having the singular lead role in covert action.[66] This is further codified in Executive Order 12333, as most recently amended in July 2008 which states:

> No agency except the Central Intelligence Agency (or the Armed Forces of the United States in time of war declared by the Congress or during any period covered by a report from the President to the Congress consistent with the War Powers Resolution, Public Law 93-148) may conduct any covert action/activity

[66] Erwin, 3.

> unless the President determines that another agency is more likely to achieve a particular objective.[67]

With the rise of the Gray Zone, and the lines between war and peace being increasingly blurred, at what point does the transfer of covert action authority alluded to above from the CIA to the military occur and should it? One particular area of concern is the legal ramifications for both the United States and international organizations, such as the United Nations, and treaties, such as the Geneva Conventions, to which the United States is a member or signatory, respectively.

International law and norms of behavior in regard to espionage and covert action during peacetime are ill-defined most likely because no nation wants to limit their collection capabilities or admit to them at all. As such, individual nations have their own laws and punishments for violations thereof. Nations privately recognize that espionage is the current state of affairs and it only becomes an issue when made public, such as when the United States tacitly admitted to using the U-2 aircraft to spy on the Soviet Union. "Intelligence activities are now accepted as a common, even inherent, attribute of the modern state. Moreover, the success of international peace operations, and the positive contribution of non-governmental organizations to conflict resolution often depend upon timely, accurate intelligence."[68]

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[67] U.S. President, "Executive Order 12333: United States Intelligence Activities (As Amended by Executive Orders 13284 (2003), 13355 (2004) and 13470 (2008))," Central Intelligence Agency, December 4, 1981, accessed November 10, 2016, https://www.cia.gov/about-cia/eo12333.html.

[68] Geoffrey B. Demarest, "Espionage in International Law," *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy* 24 (Spring 1996): 321, accessed January 10, 2017, https://litigation-essentials.lexisnexis.com/webcd/app?action=Document

Covert action is, however, separate from pure intelligence activities as the latter are generally passive while the former is active and involves agents affecting or influencing the internal workings of a target nation. Covert action is implicitly regarded as inconsistent with the U.N. Charter under article two as nations should not violate the integrity of any other state: "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."[69] This provision of the charter increases the political risk of covert action, as is evident in U.S. history when programs are exposed. This risk has led to the gradually increasing reporting requirements written into law by Congress mentioned above to ensure the President of the United States and the executive branch do not involve the nation in "secret wars" without the American people, through the Congress, being aware of their political necessity. Of note, despite the implicit proscription of covert action by the United Nations and the international community, covert action is legally authorized by U.S. Title and Executive Order. Therefore while publicly the United States will not admit to conducting covert action, it is authorized by law. Only when covert action is exposed does it create an international issue similar to espionage between nations.

Within its legal framework, the United States routinely conducts espionage activities throughout the world. These activities are generally benign and only used to

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Display&crawlid=1&doctype=cite&docid=24+Denv.+J.+Int'l+L.+%26+Pol'y+321&srctype=smi&srcid=3B15&key=7229ada4c8edabef1dac07b104c27201.

[69] United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, June 26, 1945, accessed February 13, 2017, http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-i/index.html.

maintain the informational edge of the United States on the world stage.[70] As they are chartered with the conduct of foreign intelligence collection, personnel of the CIA operate in and around U.S. missions and consulates globally. Again, given the inherent secrecy of the organization, the CIA does not publicly acknowledge espionage efforts but one can reasonably assume they have at least a minimal presence across the globe. To this end, these operatives generally work under the diplomatic mission and are afforded the same considerations as any other diplomat. While the level of status varies from person to person and nation to nation, a level of immunity is provided to CIA operatives who are working as a part of a diplomatic mission.[71] This is often different from military personnel who work for a diplomatic mission on a limited basis and whose presence is governed by a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the host nation. A SOFA is a multilateral or bilateral agreement between nations over how U.S. personnel, particularly military personnel, will be viewed in the eyes of the law of the host nation. "SOFAs provide for rights and privileges of covered individuals while in a foreign jurisdiction and address how the domestic laws of the foreign jurisdiction apply to U.S. personnel. SOFAs may include many provisions, but the most common issue addressed is which country may exercise criminal jurisdiction over U.S. personnel."[72]

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[70] Demarest.

[71] Michael John Garcia, *Immunities Afforded to Diplomats, Consular Offices, and Employees of International Organizations under U.S. Law* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2005).

[72] R. Chuck Mason, *Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA): What Is It, and How Has It Been Utilized?* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2012), 1.

In spite of the potential differences in diplomatic status of U.S. personnel overseas, their participation in covert action of any scale is generally frowned upon. Therefore, while minor differences exist, any U.S. citizen, regardless of diplomatic or military status, caught conducting a covert action against a sovereign state would likely face severe punishment. Depending on the level of infraction, it is less likely that a foreign nation would cut diplomatic ties with the U.S. than order the departure of U.S. military personnel and the cancellation of a SOFA, in the case of the exposure of a covert action. This risk is only intensified by the potential reaction of a foreign nation to military personnel conducting covert-like activities being construed as an act of war versus a diplomatic snafu, because if the alleged perpetrator were military, the action would carry with it an implication of follow-on operations. This implication is supported by SOF doctrine which includes a range of military capabilities.

Current SOF Capabilities

Following the establishment of USSOCOM as a unified combatant command, each of the services followed suit to provide their respective special operations communities their requisite command structures. The Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM or NAVSOC) was established first in 1987, the United States Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) was established in 1989, the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) in 1990, and finally the Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC) in 2005. During the late 1980's and into the 1990's, USSOCOM began to find its role within the larger DoD in combat operations in the

Caribbean, Africa, and the Middle East.[73] SOF provided capabilities to the President and regional commanders that produce strategic effects from tactical actions. Specifically their roles as hostage-rescue and direct action forces in Panama and Somalia gained them significant prestige prosecuting high-value targets with small elite units as opposed to massed combat power. Support to Operation Desert Storm through Special Reconnaissance and "SCUD hunting" provided the task force commander the security he needed from the political and strategic fears of Iraqi attacks against Israel.[74] Through these and other engagements USSOCOM began to cement their place as a major combat enabler operating outside the bounds of "traditional military activities."

Since its inception, USSOCOM and its subordinate commands have been heavily involved with the US interagency in the counter-terrorism fight. Following the attacks of September 11, 2001 senior defense officials preferred large-scale conventional and air attacks as retaliation, but the interagency community led by the CIA director recognized the Special Warfare capabilities of SOF. "It was the CIA, not DoD pundits that recommended a SOF and SF approach in Afghanistan."[75] This approach led to the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan by the Northern Alliance within four months through an unconventional warfare (UW) campaign that was resourced by the CIA and executed by combined CIA and Special Forces operators.[76] The invasion of Iraq in 2003

[73] Schemmer, 140.

[74] Ibid., 139.

[75] Bramble, 6.

[76] Doug Stanton, *Horse Soldiers* (New York: Scribner, 2009).

included another unconventional warfare campaign in the North, where the CIA and Special Forces again combined efforts to support Kurdish forces in attacking Iraqi forces, thereby allowing the conventional force advance to Baghdad.[77]

While these two combat operations have consumed the majority of USSOCOMs operational capacity and resources since these initial incursions - with U.S. Central Command receiving roughly 85 percent of personnel and money[78] - for USSOCOM, the Global War on Terror was not constrained to the Middle East, but expanded globally. Through the Unified Command Plan USSOCOM was directed to plan and synchronize counter-terrorism efforts for the DoD with the Geographic Combatant Commands and other government agencies including the CIA.[79] This is accomplished through direct and indirect means, with the direct being a precise, kinetic surgical strike approach and the indirect working with and through host-nation and global partners through training, advising and assisting.[80] This puts SOF in more than 75 countries world-wide conducting operations across the core SOF activities[81] to protect the national interests of the United

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[77] Best and Feickert, 2.

[78] U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Service. Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, *The Future of US Special Operations Forces: Ten Years after 9/11 and Twenty-Five Years after Goldwater-Nichols,* 112th Cong., 1st sess., 22 September 2011 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2012), accessed January 5, 2017, https://archive.org/details/gov.gpo.fdsys.CHRG-112hhrg70785, 6.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

[81] The Special Operations CORE activities are Direct Action, Special Reconnaissance, Unconventional Warfare, Foreign Internal Defense, Civil Affairs Operations, Counter-terrorism, Military Information Support Operations, Counter-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, Security Force Assistance, Counter-insurgency, Hostage Rescue and Recovery, and Foreign Humanitarian Assistance;

States and its allies and partners. USSOCOM commander Admiral McRaven highlighted his command's role in the Global War on Terror at a House Armed Services Committee Hearing, when he said "Since 9/11, our force has doubled in size, our budget has tripled, and our deployment requirements have quadrupled."[82] Thus, it is readily apparent that SOF have found a significant role in the Global War on Terror and their services are in increasing demand.

The current capabilities of USSOCOM are best summarized by its [former] commander General Joseph Votel in his Posture Statement to Congress of 18 March 2015, in which he stated that the mission of USSOCOM is "to provide SOF to support persistent, networked, and distributed Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) operations to protect and advance our nation's interests." He noted that USSOCOM includes over 69,000 men and women as operators, enablers and support personnel, with over 10,000 deployed to more than 80 countries worldwide. USSOCOMs "comparative advantage in this environment is built upon three pillars: (1) persistent engagement, (2) enabling partners, and (3) discreet action."[83]

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additionally Special Operations are authorized to conduct any other operation as determined by the President or the Secretary of Defense

[82] U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Service. Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, 6.

[83] U.S. Congress, House, *Statement of General Joseph L. Votel, Commander, U.S. Central Command Before the House Armed Services Committee on the Posture of U.S. Central Command*, March 18, 2015, accessed November 18, 2016, https://www.socom.mil/about/posture-statement.

Of these three pillars, the first two directly coincide with the Global SOF Network and will be discussed in the next section however the third pillar, discreet action, offers an insight into the covert-like potential of SOF.

While any of SOFs 12 Core activities could be conducted "discreetly" this research will focus on unconventional warfare, military information support operations, and preparation of the environment (while not a core activity of SOF, it is a military activity in which SOF routinely engages in). These activities most closely resemble CIA covert action and are discussed individually and in detail later in the chapter.

An important consideration beyond Core activities and capabilities of SOF pertains to the authority of the Commander of USSOCOM that General Votel mentioned. In February 2013, the Secretary of Defense transferred combatant command of the Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs) from the Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC) to USSOCOM. This means that while the GCCs have Operational Control of the TSOCs and those forces assigned or attached to them, USSOCOM executes Title 10 authority and can move and reallocate forces as needed without involving the GCC. This provides the USSOCOM Commander significant operational flexibility to move forces as needed to counter threats globally while still providing regionally aligned forces to the GCC. The TSOCs and their relationship plays an important role in the execution of the Global SOF Network as the GCCs and TSOCs plan and develop their theater security cooperation plan in concert with the State Department and other interagency partners to provide for the persistent engagement and presence General Votel outlined and which was introduced by Admiral McRaven as the Global SOF Network.

Global SOF Network

The Global SOF Network was created in 2013 by the then Commander of USSOCOM Admiral William H. McRaven. Admiral McRaven's vision of the Global SOF Network was a fully integrated global SOF presence wherein U.S. SOF operators maintain a small, scalable presence around the globe providing direct support to host-nation SOF, the GCCs, and Chiefs of Mission through their engagement with SOF elements. This engagement would allow "U.S. and partner nations to share information, improve interoperability and, when necessary, work together abroad."[84] The Global SOF Network was created as the SOF answer to the requirements levied by the Secretary of Defense in January 2012 in his Defense Strategic Guidance and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Capstone Concept for Joint Operations. These documents stressed building "agile, flexible, ready" joint forces that focus on "building a stronger network to defeat the networks that confront us."[85] Admiral McRaven's 2013 posture statement describes the interconnected and networked world that poses "complex and dynamic risks to U.S. interests around the world."[86] Admiral McRaven quotes former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to help define the strategic environment by stating that with the complexity of modern geopolitical interactions, no nation, especially the U.S., should

[84] U.S. Congress, House, *Statement of Admiral William H. McRaven, USN, Commander, United States Special Operations Command Before the 113th Congress House Armed Services Committee*, March 6, 2013, accessed November 21, 2016, http://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20130306/100394/HHRG-113-AS00-Wstate-McRavenUSNA-20130306.pdf, 6.

[85] Ibid., 1.

[86] Ibid.

conduct military operations unilaterally.[87] Admiral McRaven then explains that USSOCOM works to provide the GCCs and Chiefs of Mission the best operators in the world for their employment, noting also that while direct action is an important element of SOF capability, it is only a small part. The focus of the majority of SOF is instead on "working with our allies around the world, helping build indigenous special operations capacity so that our partners can effectively deal with the threat of violent extremists groups, insurgents, and narco-terrorists themselves. Indeed, SOF focuses intently on building partner-capacity and security force assistance so that local and regional threats do not become global and thus more costly."[88]

Currently, the Global SOF Network and its persistent presence is one of the primary roles of SOF. "We conduct persistent engagement in a variety of strategically important locations with a small-footprint approach that integrates a network of partners. This engagement allows us to nurture relationships prior to conflict... We are most effective when we deliberately build inroads over time with partners who share our interests. This engagement allows SOF to buy time to prevent conflict in the first place."[89] These engagements take place in over 15 nations worldwide with a further 13 nations providing members of their SOF to the USSOCOM headquarters in Tampa, Florida.[90]

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[87] Ibid., 2-3.

[88] Ibid., 4.

[89] U.S. Congress, House, *Statement of General Joseph L. Votel.*

[90] Ibid.

Admiral McRaven did not just foresee working with international SOF elements. He also created Special Operations Support Teams (SOSTs) that "work with our interagency partners in the National Capital Region (NCR) . . . assist[ing] in synchronizing DoD planning for training, exercises and operations. Currently, we have SOSTs working within 19 U.S. government departments and agencies."[91] These SOSTs "ensure that the perspectives and capabilities of interagency and international mission partners are incorporated into all phases of SOF planning efforts."[92]

Unconventional Warfare

Unconventional warfare (UW) is one of the core activities of U.S. Special Operations and is codified within Title 10 U.S. Code Article 167 along with nine other activities. UW makes up the bedrock of USSOCOMs Special Warfare capability and U.S. Army Special Forces are specifically designed and task organized for UW. "UW consists of operations and activities that are conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area."[93] "Unconventional warfare is fundamentally an indirect application of U.S. power, one that leverages foreign population groups to maintain or advance U.S. interests. It is a highly discretionary form of warfare that is most often conducted clandestinely, and

[91] U.S. Congress, House, *Statement of Admiral William H. McRaven*, 6-7.

[92] Ibid., 7.

[93] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-05, II-8.

because it is also typically conducted covertly, at least initially, it nearly always has a strong interagency element."[94]

As a model, UW consists of seven phases: Preparation, Initial Contact, Infiltration, Organization, Build-up, Employment, and Transition. These phases are briefly explained in figure 3 and are built around the model of U.S. sponsorship of an insurgency.

[94] Votel et al., 101-109.

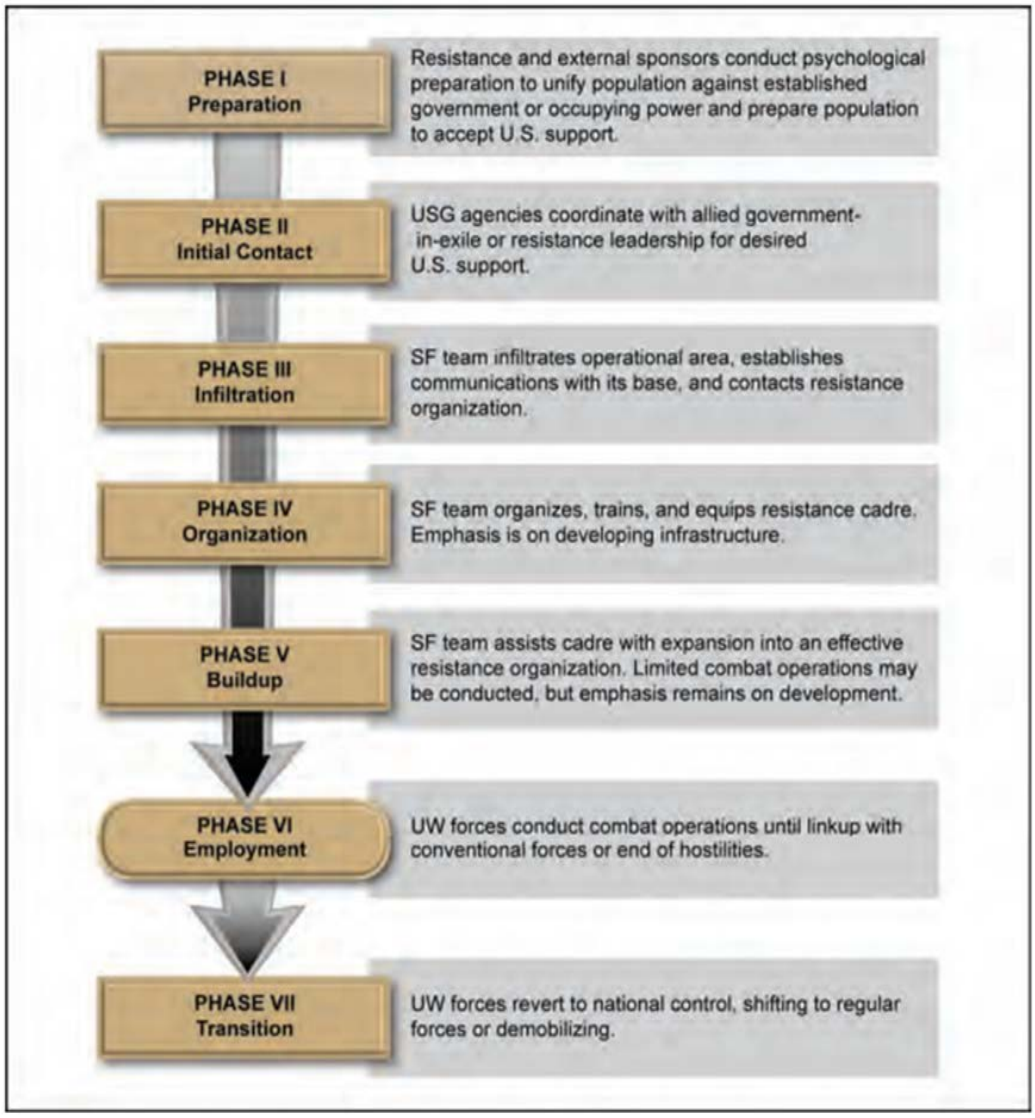

Figure 3. Phases of Unconventional Warfare

Source: United States Army, Training Circular 18-01, *Special Forces Unconventional Warfare* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), I-9.

An insurgency often consists of three stages: Latent and Incipient, Guerilla Warfare, and War of Movement. The latent and incipient stage generally consists of building the underground and auxiliary with little to no actions taken against the government. The guerilla warfare stage starts acts of active subversion and sabotage by

the underground and initial raids and attacks by small guerilla forces. Finally, the war of movement stage is full-scale combat operations against the government's military to ultimately defeat them militarily.[95] The insurgency will begin as clandestine and covert in the latent and incipient stage. In the guerilla warfare stage the underground activities will be covert only as their actions will have physical effects on the government they are working against. Finally, in the war of movement stage, the actions of the insurgency are overt as they are actively combatting the government or hostile power. U.S. UW involvement in the insurgency can enter at any point within the insurgency and could involve CIA paramilitary officers or SOF operators usually depending on whether the USG is officially recognizing their involvement, this will be further discussed in a later section.[96] Some of the activities associated with insurgencies are listed below with the overt activities of the guerillas above the black line, and the clandestine and or covert activities of the underground below the black line in figure 4.

[95] United States Army, Training Circular 18-01, *Special Forces Unconventional Warfare* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), II-6 to II-8.

[96] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-05, II-9.

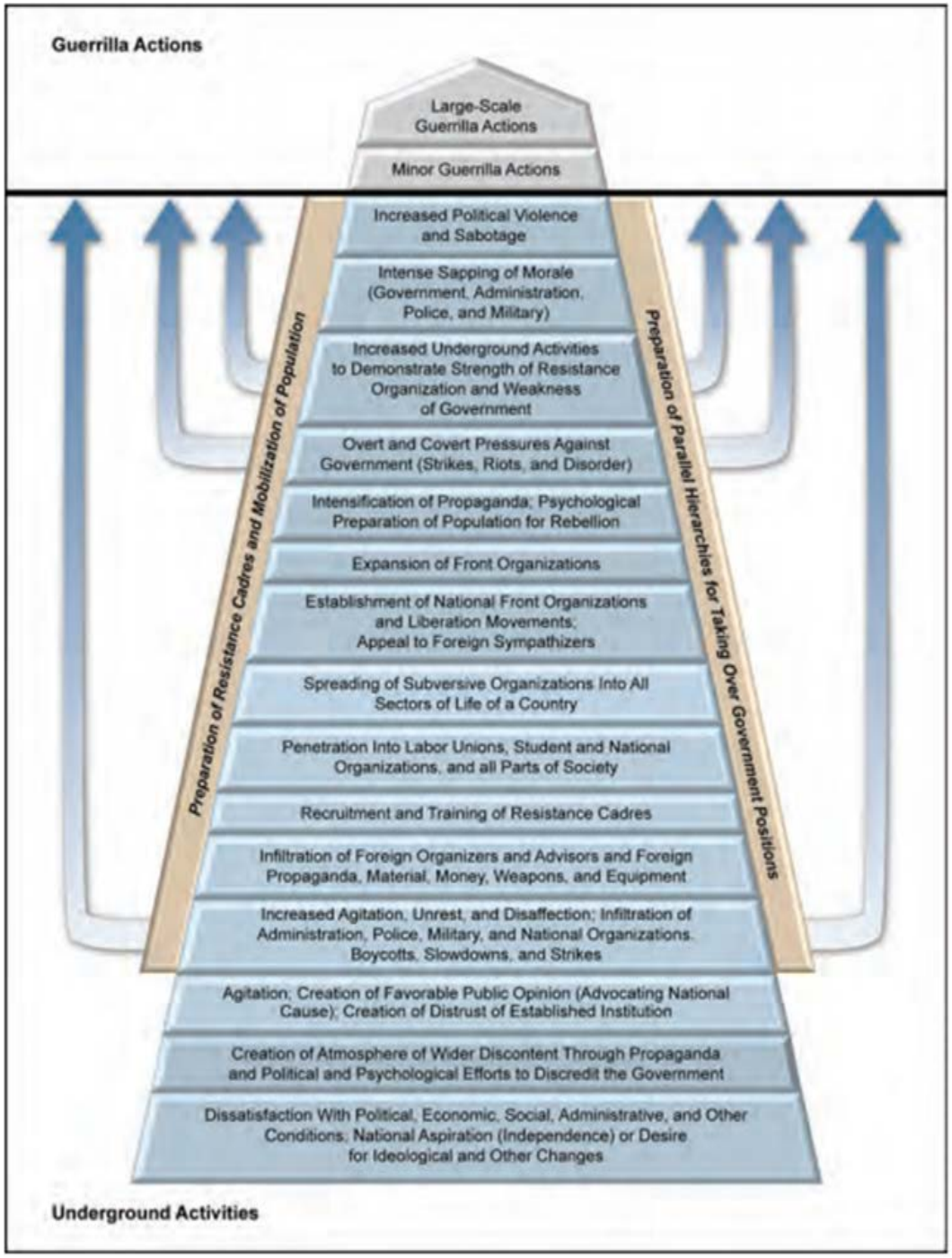

Figure 4. Underground Activities

Source: United States Army, Training Circular 18-01, *Special Forces Unconventional Warfare* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), I-9.

Influence Operations

Another core activity of U.S. Special Operations codified within Title 10 U.S. Code Article 167 is Military Information Support Operations (MISO). MISO can be understood as influence operations as they are designed to modify the opinions of foreigners in support of USG objectives. "MISO are planned to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to the originator's objectives."[97] These operations are designed to be carried out simultaneously with other special warfare activities to modify opinions in support of other U.S. operations. These operations produce various products and utilize various methods to deliver the message. MISO uses everything from digital media and social networks, to billboards and airdropped fliers, to word-of-mouth and radio broadcasts.

All of the various methods are categorized into open attribution, partial or delayed attribution, and non-attribution based on the audience and desired effects. Attribution is completely overt when the target audience knows that the message or product is from the USG. Partial or delayed attribution includes a clandestine layer wherein initially, for a planned period of time, the target audience does not know where the message originated or they believe the message originated from a third party disassociated with the USG. The delay is planned based off of requirements of the supported operation. Non-attribution conceals all ties to the USG and is ultimately covert. This method is used

[97] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-05, II-14.

when the USG desires that the target audience believe the originator is someone other than the USG. Here the reasons can be varied but are often due to the sensitive nature of the supported operation and/or a general anti-U.S. attitude in the target audience where anonymity would help ensure the message was positively received in line with targeting objectives.[98]

Preparation of the Environment

Intelligence is extremely important for both direct and indirect special operations. For direct operations, SOF are used as a surgical strike capability that requires precise information on the target's location and disposition. In indirect operations, there is often an element of uncertainty, but due to the politically sensitive nature of SOF operations and generally austere physical environment, intelligence is still of paramount importance to mitigate risk and support operational elements in achieving their mission objectives. To that end, SOF conduct Preparation of the Environment (PE). "PE is an umbrella term for activities conducted by selectivity trained SOF to prepare the operational environment for potential special operations. PE consists of OPE [Operational Preparation of the Environment] and special operations AFO [Advanced Force Operations]. PE is supported by intelligence operations. Intelligence typically builds on the information provided by OPE and special operations AFO."[99]

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[98] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-13.2, *Military Information Support Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), V-2.

[99] Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-05, IV-3.

Preparation of the Environment and to a greater extent OPE provide significant flexibility in operations as they include some specific tasks but are still very nebulous. "OPE is broadly understood as the conduct of activities in likely or potential operational areas to prepare and shape the operational environment."[100] The operational potential found within OPE is very important as the Geographic Combatant Commander can employ it if he believes future operations will be conducted by SOF. Employment of OPE includes activities such as "developing knowledge of the operational environment, establish human and physical infrastructure, and for general target development."[101] The establishment of human infrastructure involves creating networks of individuals who can either provide a service or perform a task for SOF. The physical infrastructure includes physical objects that are prepositioned for various uses. Both the human and physical infrastructure are created so that in the event a SOF or conventional force operation occurs in the area, the network or item is on hand for use. Establishment of human and physical infrastructure includes the Global SOF Network as USSOF are developing a human network of SOF operators who can support U.S. operations and objectives with international concurrence. OPE provides a large capability for the GCC to conduct low-level shaping operations prior to open conflicts within the "Gray Zone."

[100] Ibid., IV-4.

[101] Ibid.

Comparison of SOF UW and MISO and CIA Paramilitary Operations and Covert Influence

As previously noted, there are 12 core activities of USSOCOM, nine of which are codified in Title 10 of the U.S. Code (there is a tenth activity however it is "Other Activities as determined by the President or Secretary of Defense"). From these ten, UW, Influence Operations, and OPE most closely resemble the CIA's covert actions i.e. paramilitary and covert influence or "black" propaganda operations. There are, however, notable similarities and differences.

Paramilitary operations are very similar to UW in that CIA operatives will work through an underground, auxiliary, and/or guerilla force to coerce, disrupt or overthrow a government. A significant difference is that while covert action was defined by statute in 1991, no such definition exists for UW. The U.S. military has defined the term in joint doctrine, but UW lacks a clear statutory definition.[102] Another difference is that while SOF may begin a UW campaign covertly, these operations will likely transition to an overt presence throughout the conduct of the campaign. Usually, this is simultaneous with the introduction of conventional forces, as was the case when the Jedburgh teams worked with the French resistance prior to D-Day, or Special Forces worked with the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan prior to the introduction of U.S. airpower. The CIA, however, will attempt to maintain the covert character of their connection to the

[102] Jennifer Obernier and Frank Sanders, "Enabling Unconventional Warfare to Address Grey Zone Conflicts," *Small Wars Journal* (September 28, 2016), accessed October 3, 2016, http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/enabling-unconventional-warfare-to-address-grey-zone-conflicts.

paramilitary force throughout the duration of the operation and will deny involvement if the operation is compromised.

The same is true for the CIA's covert influence, better known as "black" propaganda. It is always at least miss-attributable or delayed-attribution but more often than not will be completely non-attributable. Their methods are a reflection of this as they will likely spread subversive messages through layers of intermediaries and recruited agents.[103] This is fundamentally different from the overt dropping of leaflets and other less than covert means employed by U.S. SOF.[104] The ultimate objectives are still the same however, to influence a specific population to change their attitudes or behavior and shift them towards a specific ends in line with U.S. national interests.

To this point, this chapter has laid the foundation for the case study analysis by exploring the history of the CIA and SOF, their authorities and capabilities, legal and diplomatic considerations, and the current posture of SOF to provide options to national-level authorities. Building on this foundation, the analysis now turns to specific case studies.

Case Study Introduction

This research will now transition from the contemporary comparison of the CIA and SOF and begin the discussion and analysis of three separate case studies. All three will focus on the covert application of CIA, SOF, and SOF-like operations. The eras

[103] Gregory F. Treverton, *Covert Action: The Limits of Intervention in the Post War World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 14-17.

[104] Schemmer.

represented track with the development of both organizations and embody significant changes in the structure and form of the combined covert, and covert-like enterprise of the USG. The cases will be covered chronologically beginning with the Korean War, then the Phoenix Program of the Vietnam War, and finally the U.S. sponsorship of the El Salvadoran government during their civil war.

Case Study #1: The Korean War

The Korean War offers an interesting case study thanks to the unique political landscape of the time both domestically and relative to the foreign relations of the United States. With the end of World War II in 1945 and the Truman administration's strong desire to return the nation to pre-war "normalcy," there was a massive downsizing of the military and war apparatus including the OSS and its various covert and clandestine efforts.[105] As atomic weapons were beginning to be seen as the ultimate "end-game" to war and a more cost effective approach to defense, the conventional army faced massive cuts and nearly all special projects were immediately defunct.[106] Many subject matter experts left the military or found conventional jobs within the military, and their talents and experience were generally forgotten.[107]

The government quickly realized its error in eliminating the national intelligence service and created the Central Intelligence Agency in 1947 to provide human

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[105] Patrick J. Pacalo, *Cold Warfare: A Compact History* (Baltimore, MD: Publish America, 2006), 36.

[106] Raymond K. Bluhm et al., *U.S. Army: A Complete History* (Arlington, VA: Hugh Lauter Levin Associates, 2004), 754-755.

[107] Pacalo, 43-44.

intelligence collection and all-source analysis for the president and the National Security Council.[108] However, when the Korean War began in June 1950, the military was completely unprepared to conduct any sort of clandestine or covert activities, while the young CIA had the requisite capacity and capability but lacked any significant presence on the Korean peninsula. For the next three years, a conflict of control was fought within the U.S. government over who would conduct covert and clandestine activities in a wartime environment.[109] Given the scope and breadth of programs that were conducted, this research will present each of the pertinent programs briefly, categorized by branch of service starting with the Army, then Air Force, then Navy and Marine Corps, and finally the CIA. Following this introduction, the research will analyze the associated factors outlined in chapter 3.[110]

Army

Once the Army was committed with ground forces into Korea on 30 June 1950, the Far East Command (FEC) Intelligence Directorate (G-2) struggled to meet the information demands of the military for both tactical and operational level intelligence. As an answer to this, the G-2 created the Liaison Group (LG) within the intelligence directorate to coordinate the clandestine information collection effort of the military. The LG had many intelligence gathering functions spread across various platforms but one,

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[108] Ibid., 37-43.

[109] John Prados, *Presidents' Secret Wars: CIA and Pentagon Covert Operations Since World War II* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), 70, 79-80.

[110] For the listed factors see pages 28-30.

the Korean Labor Organization (KLO), had been created two years earlier to observe North Korean activities, and, following the outbreak of war, they became the focal point for ground penetration intelligence gathering using Korean surrogates. Multiple operations would eventually be conducted under the KLO cover, but the LG began with the Tactical Liaison Office (TLO), which manager line-crossers. They were South Koreans who were handled by U.S. operators to cross the no-man's land between the fighting armies and collect specific tactical intelligence on enemy movements and numbers. These very low-level operators collected very specific tactical information and reported it back to their handlers, initially by re-crossing the line back into friendly territory and later using either a marking system for aerial observation or basic radios. TLOs would be used throughout the war in this way, and recruiting would eventually include women and children as they could more freely move around the battlefield.[111]

As the war progressed, more operational intelligence was required to facilitate battlefield preparation and understanding so the KLO recognized they needed to penetrate deeper into enemy territory. To accomplish this, they launched Operations Aviary and Salamander. Operation Aviary involved the night-time airborne insertion deep into enemy-held territory by Korean operatives code-named "rabbits." These rabbits would parachute well behind enemy lines to gather intelligence on enemy movements and possible intentions. Generally, they would have the ability to report for very short durations if at all, and would then have to return to the South by foot on their own. Operation Salamander was similar in intent but involved water-borne infiltration along

[111] Haas.

the North Korean coastline and while these operatives had a higher return rate by being recovered from the beach, their intelligence was limited to the littoral area. Both clandestine operations were used throughout the war to gather tactical and operational intelligence for the military, and while they recorded some successes, the ad hoc creation and trial-and-error implementation led to many deaths.[112]

In January 1951, in an effort to utilize the thousands of anti-communist North Koreans who were anxiously awaiting the chance to fight the communist regime, the FEC created the Attrition Section within the Eighth Army. In May 1951, this staff section was turned into a functional command and named the 8240th Army Unit (AU). The AU was charged with using the roughly 7,000 North Korean partisans available to conduct an unconventional warfare campaign against the North Koreans. These numbers would grow exponentially, and by the end of the war reach over 21,000. The AU divided their partisan efforts into three main operations: Leopard Base, Baker Section, and Task Force (TF) Kirkland.[113]

Leopard Base included about 15 different donkey units that lived and operated from desolate islands off the North Korean West coast. Also known as "White Tigers," these groups of North Korean partisans were supplied and advised by American officers to conduct covert raids along the coast to destroy North Korean outposts or lines of communication.[114]

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[112] Haas.

[113] Malcom.

[114] Ibid.

Baker Section was tasked with aerial insertion into the heart of North Korea to conduct sabotage of North Korean lines of communication and supplies. Known as "special airborne sabotage agents," Baker Section generally failed with over 350 infiltrators achieving no recognizable results. The first two operations Baker Section attempted, Operations Virginia I and Spitfire were conducted jointly by North Korean operatives and American advisors. Virginia I was a short-term sabotage mission and Spitfire was intended to be long-term through the establishment of a partisan base camp deep behind enemy lines. Both operations failed due in large part to a lack of joint integration between the Army and Air Force, and their failure resulted in Baker Section inserting Koreans only.[115]

TF Kirkland, much like Leopard Base, was tasked with covert sabotage and raids against the North Korean west coast. While these operations produced some tactical successes, they were significantly limited in their scope and duration because operational jurisdiction over the West coast had been split with the CIA, which operated in the Northern areas.[116]

Just as the Army suffered from a lack of capability for clandestine intelligence collection and sabotage operations, in 1950, the Army only had about 20 personnel trained in psychological warfare in the Tactical Information Detachment. From that group, the FEC had a psychological warfare branch with several members. Within 24 hours of U.S. deployment into Korea, this had produced leaflets that were being dropped

[115] Haas, 56.

[116] Ibid., 49.

on the peninsula and within 48 hours, they were broadcasting radio programs to the occupied areas from Japan. While these psychological warfare efforts were by and large openly attributable to the UN in general and often the U.S. specifically, their success in achieving measurable results led to their incorporation into the operations directorate of the FEC by 1952. While the messaging was generally tactical and directed at enemy combatants, such as the leaflets that were "safe passes" for surrender, efforts at strategic messaging pointed to significant potential capability to influence the operational and strategic environment.[117] Operation Moolah for example, was an attempt to coerce North Korean, Chinese, or Soviet pilots to defect with their aircraft to South Korea and the UN. While the program itself yielded no results, one North Korean pilot did defect although he had not heard of Operation Moolah until he had already defected. Coordination between Army psychological operations officers and the CIA during Operation Moolah set a foundation for future covert collaboration.[118]

In December 1951, in order to combine the various elements conducting unconventional warfare, clandestine intelligence gathering, and covert activities under one unified command, the FEC established the Covert, Clandestine, and Reconnaissance Activities-Korea (CCRAK) also known under their cover name as Combined Command, Reconnaissance Activities-Korea (CCRAK). While the CIA expected this organization to be created under its structure, the Joint Advisory Commission-Korea (JACK) created five months earlier, it was initially assigned to the FEC intelligence directorate, and later

[117] Ibid., 69-77.

[118] James E. Wise and Scott Baron. *Dangerous Games: Faces, Incidents, and Casualties of the Cold War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 66-77.

operational directorate. As will be discussed later, the CIA, owing to bad blood at higher levels, perceived this attempt to provide unity of effort to the entire partisan force as an attempt by the DoD to take over their operations. This suspicion negatively affected the relationship and had a detrimental effect on operations.[119]

Air Force

Like the CIA, the Air Force was also newly established in the post-WWII run up to the Korean War and had very little infrastructure for special operations. Initially using conventional assets to conduct unconventional actions, through the course of the war the Air Force expanded their capabilities to support covert and clandestine operations through multiple platforms and with various roles.

In March 1951, Fifth Air Force established the Special Activities Unit Number 1 later known as the 6004th Air Intelligence Service Squadron (AISS). Unit 1 was tasked with conducting intelligence collection to support air force objectives, destroy objectives through sabotage, demolition and guerilla actions, provide evasion and escape services to UN airmen, and coordinate their activities with other UN agencies as required. To accomplish this, AISS formed three detachments: Detachment One collected technical air intelligence and conducted prisoner of war interrogations. Detachment Two collected and disseminated air intelligence information. Detachment Three planned, coordinated and supported evasion and escape activities for pilots. While Detachment One's activities were classified due to the airborne and technical means used to collect intelligence, and Detachment Three's activities were classified due to the sensitive nature of personnel

[119] Haas, 39-42.

recovery in hostile, denied areas; Detachment Two's top secret activities led to it being "the first covert collection agency of a tactical nature in the history of the U.S. Air Force."[120] These activities including inserting operators behind enemy lines to detect and observe possible targets for aerial attack and following the attack, report on damage to the target. To this end Detachment Two grew to over nine hundred Korean operators who would infiltrate "north of the bomb line."[121]

At the outset of the war, the Air Force created the Special Air Missions Unit (SAM), whose primary mission was to fly and escort VIPs around the area, both as pure transportation and for aerial reconnaissance. Their secondary mission was to support the various other special activities by providing night airborne infiltration, resupply, and leaflet drops. However, in April 1952, the Air Force took the SAM and expanded it into a full command, B Flight, 6167th Operations Squadron, 5th Air Force. This expansion gave B Flight a more classified, specialized role as they now solely supported special operations, not the VIP mission of the early years. Over the course of the war SAM and B Flight greatly improved their techniques and provided additional technical requirements to the Air Force that facilitated future support to covert and clandestine operations.[122]

Among these operations was the 581st Air Resupply and Communications Wing. The 581st which became operational in the late spring of 1952, had a modular concept with three Squadrons. The resupply squadron had multiple aircraft platforms that

[120] Ibid., 85.

[121] Ibid., 86.

[122] Ibid., 91-105.

included helicopters and could be used for a variety of purposes. The holding squadron provided classified briefings to those personnel who would be traveling behind enemy lines and a reproduction company that could print four million leaflets in 24 hours. This unit provided direct support to the CIA's covert operations that crossed from North Korea into China, including quick reaction search and rescue support. The 581st later served as a support unit for the U.S. government's first covert support to the French in Indochina.[123]

U.S. Navy

The Navy, also reeling from the massive downsizing of the military following WWII, had very few assets to directly support ground forces during their retreat to and defense of the Pusan perimeter in the opening stages of the Korean War. While they tried to support by destroying the North Korean lines of communication from the coast, they found that the Korean landscape and North Korean tunnel system made this very difficult. In response, Navy Far East tasked Task Force (TF) 90, the Far East Command's Amphibious Force, to use amphibious ships and raiders to break the lines of communication in support of the ground forces.

TF 90 used their Transport Division III, which consisted of "high speed transports" and their newly created Special Operations Group, an ad hoc force of Marine reconnaissance and underwater demolition personnel, to conduct these raids. The raids were very successful at the tactical level as the raiders were able to conduct demolition and sabotage missions all along the coastline. At the operational level, they forced the

[123] Ibid., 114-129.

North Koreans to devote more resources to protect and rebuild their supply lines. The raiding parties were reduced, however, once planning and preparation for the landings at Inchon were underway as all U.S. Marines would be participating in that attack. The impact of this reduction in capability was particularly evident in the case of the USS Perch, a submarine that was outfitted to clandestinely infiltrate 110 raiders. Once all U.S. raiding forces became unavailable, the Perch was forced to conduct raids not using U.S. personnel but British commandos.[124]

The success of these raiding parties and the transport ships led the CIA to incorporate them significantly into their operations as well. The CIA would use the raids as cover to insert and leave behind operatives to move inland and conduct guerilla warfare. These joint operations were highly successful.[125]

Central Intelligence Agency

As previously mentioned, the CIA was a relatively new organization at the start of the Korean War and therefore had to contend with a number of challenges. These challenges were only compounded by the poor relationship between the CIA and the Far East Command Commander, General Douglas MacArthur. The CIA had been blamed for several intelligence "failures," including not predicting the revolution in Guatemala in 1948, the Soviet detonation of an atomic bomb in 1949 and finally the North Korean

[124] Ibid., Chapter 3.

[125] Ibid., 169-171.

invasion in June 1950,[126] never mind they had only been in Asia starting in 1950.[127] Coupled with this credibility issue, the CIA faced three distinct challenges in Korea. First, due to its global mission, the CIA could not focus its resources on Korea as a Soviet invasion into Europe was viewed as a more significant concern. Second, it was required to provide effective tactical and strategic level intelligence to the FEC. These two challenges were significantly compounded by the third: MacArthur's complete opposition to CIA presence in Asia. Despite facing these challenges, the CIA provided support to the war effort through espionage, covert action, and guerilla warfare in both North Korea and China.[128]

The Office of Special Operations (OSO) was responsible for the CIA's espionage activities. These operations were similar to the Army's use of line-crossers, but the CIA was particularly effective with stay-behind collectors. These agents were inserted during the retreat on the friendly side of the battlefield and would wait for the battle to pass over them, then start reporting on enemy positions and movements. These operatives were particularly effective following the Chinese invasion. While OSO was growing considerably in their capacity and capability, their focus remained on tactical level intelligence through 1951. "Of the OSO reports disseminated between 1 November 1950 and 31 October 1951, 50 percent dealt with military or tactical information, 30 percent

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[126] G.J.A. O'Toole, *Honorable Treachery: A History of U.S. Intelligence, Espionage, and Covert Action from the American Revolution to the CIA* (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1992), 441-442.

[127] Prados, 65-68.

[128] Haas, 177.

with North Korean political information, 15 percent with economic intelligence, and 5 percent with biographic data."[129] Following this reporting period, however, the OSO began to shift its effort from tactical to long-range strategic intelligence, with 40 percent being military support information and 60 percent being long-range information on North Korea and China. Alongside their espionage effort, like the military, the CIA engaged in partisan efforts.[130]

The Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) was the lead element for the CIA's covert action, paramilitary and guerilla warfare in North Korea. Their actions were like those of the military wherein the OPC inserted guerilla forces behind the lines either through airborne or seaborne infiltration. These operations were often supported by the same Air Force or Navy units that supported the military's efforts. The OPC however, was much more successful. This is likely partially due to their active recruitment of former OSS operatives and UW experts they poached from the Army replacement depot in Japan. With these experts, they learned lessons far more quickly and were able to be much more flexible and adaptable in their responses to challenges presented by the North Koreans and Chinese. Specifically, their agent cover was far better. They used the raiders to cover maritime insertions and they provided significant cover backstops to their agents including items with which to barter. This helped their agents penetrate deeper and for much longer duration. It also enabled the OPC to penetrate the Chinese border with operatives to collect on Chinese military capabilities and reserves along the border. As

[129] Ibid., 181.

[130] Ibid., 184.

operations began to expand and become more long-term the CIA realized it needed to combine these efforts to ensure its own unity of effort in Korea, which it did in July 1951 with the establishment of the Joint Advisory Commission-Korea (JACK).[131]

JACK was the cover name for the CIA's operational and intelligence activities on the Korean peninsula. The JACK was very successful at marrying the two efforts into one. This success contributed to the sense of surprise when the military's CCRAK, not the JACK, was not put in overall charge of all covert and intelligence activities in Korea. While at the strategic level this caused a great deal of consternation, at the operator level it was inconsequential. The military advisors and CIA operatives worked hand-in hand with little issue despite the directorate level issues.[132] Nonetheless, one group remained beyond the scope of both the JACK and CCRAK the CIA's covert program to infiltrate raiders into mainland China to spy on and disrupt their military forces and relieve some of the pressure on UN forces in Korea.[133]

The Western Enterprises Incorporated (WEI) was the CIA cover for a large covert program to infiltrate Chinese guerillas through the South East China from various islands off the coast. Beginning in March of 1951, these anti-communist guerillas were trained, supplied, and led by CIA operatives working undercover on the island of Quemoy, among others. Eventually reaching a battalion-sized force of trained raiders, and including some Chinese maritime platforms, the WEI program was a massive covert

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[131] Ibid., 177-179.

[132] Ibid., 186.

[133] Frank Holober, *Raiders of the China Coast: CIA Covert Operations during the Korean War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 2.

undertaking. While it is unknown whether these raiders had the intended effect of relieving pressure on UN forces in Korea, these raids were largely tactically successful and provided the CIA a battlefield on which to improve their paramilitary capabilities.[134]

Analysis

The strategic environment of the Korean War was one of undeclared war that was sanctioned by a UN Security Council resolution and predicated by the United States reversing its stance by intervening in a war between the North and South. While Congress never officially declared war, they authorized the President to use force if necessary to defend democracy and freedom from the communists. This war was the first "hot" conflict of the Cold War, a significant factor in the president's decision to commit forces, but with restraint.

The president's decision shaped the operational environment for these forces. Absent the commitment of the full weight and might of the United States military, including its atomic capability and forces defending Western Europe, and given the government's unwillingness to commit totally to the conflict, the military tried to find an edge through asymmetric means. While the OSS and special operations units had been successful during WWII, during the demobilization process, most of these forces were disbanded and their veterans discharged. The military needed to remake, almost from scratch, the same asymmetric means used earlier in the form of the aforementioned guerilla, partisan, and paramilitary forces. These means demonstrated the potential capability found in special operations to support conventional warfare campaigns. The

[134] Ibid.

operational environment was also characterized by inexperience and poor training of military personnel because of the recent demobilization and poaching by the CIA of experienced operators from the former OSS. Nonetheless, some military operatives were able to successfully conduct operations and achieve positive results against the North Koreans and Chinese while the CIA enjoyed varying levels of success as well. Through their partisan forces, they were able to redirect Chinese and North Korean military power to defend their lines of communication, thereby reducing the numbers of front-line troops and facilitating the halting of the Chinese advance.

The CIA faced significant problems as well, particularly thanks to the military's desire to use a national strategic-level asset for tactical intelligence. While this distraction to the CIA's operations was eventually reduced by the introduction of the JACK structure, the CIA-FEC quarrel hindered adequate communication between agencies. This led to a duplicative effort with multiple groups doing the same thing, albeit in slightly different ways. "This duplication (and misplaced competition) of effort would have serious long-term consequences on the overall partisan program-consequences from which only the Communists would benefit."[135]

While not officially "Special Operations Forces" the military operatives that presaged those we know today were used in roughly the same manner as modern SOF. The Army provided unconventional warfare experts who lived with the partisans in hostile areas and operated in especially austere conditions. The Air Force provided aerial insertion platforms, collection platforms, and evasion assistance. The Navy and Marines

[135] Haas, 35.

provided an unparalleled amphibious capability. While combining their efforts took a considerable amount of time and the lives of many Koreans, the eventual creation of the CCRAK to unite the various efforts under the operations directorate would later demonstrate the necessity to have a single special operations command element, a lesson that would be carried forward into the Vietnam War.

The lessons from the covert activities in Korea at the operational and strategic level are about unified action and communication. The efforts of each of these groups were duplicative. The Army, Air Force, and CIA all had the same idea to insert partisans into enemy-held territory to conduct espionage, sabotage, and subversion against the communists. There were even examples of some of these operators being on the same flight for insertion.[136] While the CCRAK aimed to fix this issue, it was far too late, and due to its controversial beginnings, the JACK and CIA did not trust that the CCRAK was not just an attempt by the DoD to take over their partisan efforts. The most successful synchronization effort above the tactical level was the de-confliction between TF Kirkland and CIA along the Eastern coast for operations. There was a clearly defined geographic boundary that restricted the operations of each force with the CIA to the north and the military south of the line. While this may have restricted each in the conduct of their operations, the reduction in risk of operational fratricide was paramount and proved to overcome the control debate within the USG.

This analysis of the case study of clandestine and covert operations by the military and the CIA during the Korean War is summarized graphically in table 2.

[136] Ibid.

Table 2. Korean War Case Study Analysis					
Case Study	Strategic Setting	Operational Setting	CIA Role	SOF Role	Interactions analysis
Korean War	Limited War; prevent greater commitment by Communists	War; active conflict between U.S./ROK/UN and NK/China	Strategic: Paramilitary into China and NK; Operational: Intelligence-centric, limited direct support; Tactical: Independent Guerilla warfare campaigns against China and NK	Strategic: Psychological operations designed to cause mass defection and surrender Operational/ Tactical: partisan attacks directly supporting or independent of military campaigns	Poor; active competition for the same resources and operational areas; poor relationships led to limited operational sharing or cross-support above the tactical level

Source: Created by author.

Case Study #2: The Phoenix Program

The United States began its involvement in Indochina, in 1950 through the provision to the French colonial armed forces military equipment and weapons. “By 1954, the authorized aid had reached the sum of $1.4 billion and constituted 78 percent of

the French budget for the war."[137] The United States also provided airlift support for the French insertion into their stronghold at Dien Bien Phu through the CIA airline, CAT.[138] The United States supported the French in Indochina as part of the anti-communist strategy of containment that the United States had adopted under President Truman. Following the French defeat in 1954, the United States continued to pursue their anti-communist agenda through their support of the South Vietnamese government under President No Ninh Diem as he consolidated power within South Vietnam and fought off the communist Viet Cong insurgency within his borders.

Diem initially made significant strides in his counter-insurgency campaign, but after 1960, the communist North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh began to target the rural peasants rather than the urban proletariat and achieved remarkable success. He did this through the establishment of a shadow government within the rural hamlets and villages of South Vietnam. With over 85 percent of the South Vietnamese people living in rural areas, following this shift he had a very large pool of potential recruits and supporters. By promising the individualistic peasants their own land, the Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) of their shadow governments grew to between 80 and 150 thousand cadre spread across South Vietnam. With a large portion of the leadership coming from

[137] William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1996), 123.

[138] Ibid., 124.

North Vietnam, they still achieved a great deal of success in the early 1960s in isolating the rural people from the Government of Vietnam (GVN).[139]

While U.S. advisors had been present in South Vietnam following the peace accords of 1954, with the rise of the VCI, the U.S. advisory role grew to incorporate active operational components designed to assist the South Vietnamese in targeting and destroying the VCI. One such program was the Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation (ICEX) program begun in 1967 and renamed "Phoenix" in 1968. While the Phoenix program was little more than a coordination measure to collect intelligence and coordinate operations at a central point (first District Intelligence and Operations Coordination Centers (DIOCC) and later Provincial Intelligence and Operations Coordination Centers (PIOCC)), many programs contributed intelligence information to it, or derived operations from it. Therefore, while Phoenix was not overall "in charge" of targeting and destruction of the VCI, it offers a suitable framework within which to examine the military's special operations and CIA's paramilitary operations in and around Vietnam to destroy the VC shadow governments. Although "ICEX and Phoenix did not create or control any operational forces,"[140] they did influence those that did.

This case study will therefore examine several operations holistically under the rubric "Phoenix" as a method to separate covert and clandestine operations from other military and civilian programs including the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG), the Revolutionary Development (RD) cadres, and the Special Police (SP). This portion of

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[139] Mark Moyar, *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism in Vietnam* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

[140] Ibid., 54.

the research will begin with a historical discussion that focuses on covert and clandestine operations. It will begin with the DoD SOF units and operations including those under the Military Assistance Command Vietnam- Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG), the Mobile Strike Forces (Mike Forces), and Psychological Warfare forces. Following this it will discuss the CIA's Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRUs) and their operations. The military's special operations and the CIA worked closely regarding these programs and while MACV-SOG was a primarily military effort, the CIA were heavily involved especially at the beginning of the program. Likewise, while the PRUs were originally created, trained, equipped, and controlled by the CIA, SOF operators accompanied their operations for several years. Thus, while there was interplay between both the DoD and CIA with these forces, they will be discussed through the role of the "owner" of the program or unit. Following this introduction, the research will analyze the case using the factors outlined in chapter 3.[141]

MACV-SOG

The partner force of the MACV-SOG was originally a Vietnamese army unit stood up in 1956 to conduct covert and clandestine reconnaissance. Originally built and advised by the CIA, this Clandestine Action Force, later named the 1st Observation Group, by 1960 began taking on a more active role in combat against the VC. By 1963, most of the training had been handed off to Army Special Forces until the entire program was transferred under Operation Switchback. Included in the transfer of Operation Switchback was the Civilian Irregular Defense Force that had been created by the CIA

[141] For the listed factors see pages 28-30.

and supported with training by Army Special Forces.[142] Once handed over to the military, the programs were combined and renamed the Vietnamese Special Forces Command (VNSF), or Luc Luong Doc Biet in Vietnamese (LLDB), with U.S. Special Forces involvement. The VNSF continued its border surveillance mission but began "covert offensive operations in the North as well as Laos and South Vietnam."[143] Specifically, MACV-SOG under Operations Plan 34A, was tasked with: (1) cross-border operations to disrupt enemy lines of communication and sanctuaries in Laos, the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Vietnam, and Cambodia; (2) location and rescue of captured Americans and Vietnamese as part of assisting the escape and evasion of all imprisoned personnel and downed airmen; (3) training, launch, recovery and support for various types of agents with UW missions, including the simulation of anti-government partisan movements in North Vietnam; (4) psychological operations including "black" radio broadcasts; and (5) various special missions such as 'dirty tricks' (for example, placing booby-trapped ammunition into enemy caches), and recovery of lost or stolen U.S. sensitive items.[144]

Aside from border surveillance to detect VC infiltration routes from Laos and Cambodia, one of the first offensive operations conducted by MACV-SOG was a "series

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[142] Clayton Laurie and Andres Vaart, "CIA and the Wars in Southeast Asia," Studies in Intelligence, August 2016, accessed November 18, 2017, https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/Anthology-CIA-and-the-Wars-in-Southeast-Asia/pdfs-1/vietnam-anthology-print-version.pdf, 6-7.

[143] Adams, 118.

[144] Ibid., 121.

of ‘non-attributional’ amphibious raids . . . carried out by U.S. and indigenous forces against the North Vietnamese coast. Navy SEALs, working with Vietnamese Navy sailors, infiltrated sabotage teams ashore for attacks on infrastructure targets.”[145] This effort and operations to air insert operators and teams into North Vietnam were designed to convince the North Vietnamese government that an insurgency was brewing within their borders as a side-effect of operations. These operations achieved nothing as operators generally never returned or reported and were presumed compromised. This was coupled with two major issues surrounding a lack of interest in a resistance movement possibly brewing in the north: first, the question of what would happen to the resistance movement’s personnel if peace was achieved through treaty rather than total victory; and second, “if the Northern government did become convinced there was such an insurgent threat, its security forces would obviously retaliate against innocent minorities.”[146] Therefore, while these operations continued, they took a secondary role to reconnaissance and targeting along the border areas and into Laos and Cambodia.

Eventually allowed to penetrate 20 kilometers into these neutral nations, MACV-SOG teams consisting of several U.S. SOF and about a platoon of South Vietnamese or Montagnard tribesmen, conducted operations to target North Vietnamese and Viet Cong support structures through strategic reconnaissance and aerial attack. In consideration of the controversial act of crossing a sovereign border to conduct military actions within Laos and Cambodia, these teams attempted to be clandestine when observing and covert

[145] Ibid., 120.

[146] Ibid., 123.

when attacking targets working through their South Vietnamese or Montagnard surrogates. The North Vietnamese in turn considered these acts to violate the Geneva Convention and therefore any MACV-SOG soldiers taken "were spies and not protected by the Geneva Convention. Anyone captured could expect to be interrogated under torture and summarily executed."[147] The MACV-SOG teams also sought to capture NVA prisoners for interrogation, "conducted ambushes, placed sensors in enemy areas, placed mines and booby-traps, tapped field communication lines and sought downed aviators."[148]

Despite, or because of, their success, these operations were slowly incorporated further into and under conventional military forces to take advantage of the tactical intelligence and offensive potential. While continuing their cross-border mission, MACV-SOG forces began to be used within South Vietnam in support of corps operations particularly after the 1968 Tet Offensive.[149]

While not specifically a part of the Phoenix program, MACV-SOG made up a significant portion of the U.S. forces that attempted to identify and destroy NVA and VC infiltration into South Vietnam and thereby disrupt the VCI operations. Their efforts contributed to the overall reduction in VCI effectiveness and capability during the Phoenix and pacification programs in South Vietnam.

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[147] Ibid., 124.

[148] Ibid., 126.

[149] Ibid., 125.

Mike Forces

While the MACV-SOG was focused on the border areas and deep penetrations of Laos and Cambodia, 5th Special Forces Group, under the direction of MACV, developed a long-range reconnaissance force for use within South Vietnam. This force, initially called project Delta and later including Projects Omega and Sigma, were comprised of U.S.-led, but ethnically non-Vietnamese South Vietnamese volunteers. They "entered long-denied VC sanctuaries, directed air strikes against formerly inaccessible areas, recovered prisoners, rescued downed aircraft crews, conducted deception operations, wiretapped NVA/VC communications, performed photo reconnaissance, and developed reams of intelligence not otherwise obtainable."[150]

Their mission was based on an idea of "offensive guerilla warfare" relating to the direct action and sabotage techniques used to disrupt or destroy VCI operations throughout South Vietnam. As the war progressed, however, these forces became increasingly conventionalized, operating as both a forward reconnaissance element for corps operations, a mobile strike force against the VC army, and a quick reaction force for beleaguered conventional units.

Mike Forces supported the Phoenix program through both their directed information collection and through their targeting of VCI safe areas throughout South Vietnam. Additionally, they had a covert aspect that initially included sabotage directed against the VCI. Their covert-like activities used forces composed of mercenary-like Chinese Nungs or Cambodians. This reduced the signature of U.S. involvement and was

[150] Ibid., 128.

directly supported by “black” radio broadcasts designed to cause the VC to believe that the ethnically non-Vietnamese were united against them.[151]

Psychological Warfare Operations

The use of “black” radio stations operating under the false pretense of being North Vietnamese was the most successful example of non-attributed or mis-attributed propaganda operations executed during the Vietnam War. While South Vietnamese programs were heavily influenced by the American psychological operations community, most of the methods used were overt leaflet drops or radio broadcasts calling for the rural peasantry to stop supporting the VC or the VC to desert their formations and return to South Vietnamese society. Arguably the single most successful psychological operation of the war was the Chieu Hoi, or the Open Arms program. “Over the years, approximately 200,000 mostly lower level Viet Cong defected, or ‘rallied,’ to the South Vietnamese government. Some of these ralliers agreed to participate in propaganda campaigns.”[152]

Psychological operations supported the Phoenix program in large part through the exploitation of successes against the VCI by targeting the rural peasantry. These operations were largely overt and over the course of the conflict began to change the attitudes and perspectives of many South Vietnamese living in the villages. By 1969, many villagers who once had supported the communists no longer did. However, the covert influence operations were less necessary in Vietnam as there was an active conflict

[151] Paddock, 158-159.

[152] Ibid., 161.

with the United States clearly involved thus overt techniques were generally used to "sell the government," target the enemy to defect, and reduce the mass base of support for the VCI within South Vietnam.[153]

PRUs

The CIA were involved in many of the various contributing programs to Phoenix, as well as the Phoenix coordination centers themselves. The Phoenix coordination centers provided intelligence and targeting of VCI to the conventional U.S. Army and the Army of South Vietnam (ARVN). The CIA also supported the development of territorial forces and regional forces that principally were created to defend areas from VC isolation, much like the RD cadre and National Police Field Forces. The Special Police, however, were the most successful of the GVN controlled forces the CIA advised and assisted. They were the most capable of intelligence collection within the rural areas and through Phoenix coordination could successfully prosecute many targets. However, the most successful CIA affiliated unit in directly targeting the VCI was the PRUs.

The PRUs were originally created as the Counter-Terror Teams, and they were specifically designed to collect intelligence on VCI leadership and target them for killing or capture. These units were classified Top Secret and were relatively unknown despite their success. Their mission was first to eradicate the VC cadres, VC soldiers, and VC guerillas operating in the rural areas of South Vietnam; second to act as a quick reaction force for other government forces, forward scouts, and personnel recovery for downed flight crews. Operating almost exclusively at night, like the VC themselves, they

[153] Ibid., 161.

conducted raids and ambushes to kill or capture as many of the insurgents as possible. Often dressing as civilians or the VC, they infiltrated enemy strongholds in pursuit of their objectives. They executed these operations as either "rifle-shot" or "shotgun" operations. "Rifle-shot" operations were the direct targeting of specific individuals. These required a great deal of intelligence as they depended on knowing when and where the target would be. They were remarkably successfully but also relatively rare. More prominent were "shotgun" operations. These were based on intelligence, but may have lacked fidelity needed for "rifle-shot" actions. They were less focused on one place and time but rather on an area of time or place. These often became "cordon and search" operations but were especially useful when the PRUs wanted to maintain the anonymity of their sources by conducting "seemingly" random operations that "happened upon" VCI operations.[154]

The PRUs generally worked in and around the members' home provinces as the CIA used them as agents who communicated with their families and villages to learn of VCI activities. This was hugely important as the highly individualistic Vietnamese and ethnically non-Vietnamese peasantry were much more apt to trust those from the area than Americans or government forces. This was a huge capability that the CIA capitalized on. As the PRUs were under the exclusive control of the CIA, they often used the CIA's Air America helicopters for aerial reconnaissance or delivery. During the late 1960's, SOF units such as the Army Special Forces and Navy SEALs accompanied PRU units as a cross-training measure and to verify the reports on the successes of the

[154] Moyar, 149-150.

programs. Initially, the PRU were in high demand and the military attempted to influence the CIA to increase the numbers and capacity of the PRU and transfer authority to the MACV-SOG. The CIA refused to relinquish control for fear of the PRU being misused or over-conventionalized. “The U.S. military expressed a desire to take over the PRU program. In previous cases where it had taken control of such unconventional programs, the military had used them for conventional military purposes, so the CIA never granted this request.”[155]

Eventually however, as the American public became aware of alleged “assassination programs” in Vietnam and fearing political backlash, the military stopped assigning its personnel to accompany the PRU and the CIA banned Americans from conducting operations with them. Despite this the CIA maintained control over the PRUs until 1972 when they were integrated into the Special Police. This transfer failed and many personnel in PRU deserted, likely because the Special Police did not trust that the PRU were no longer being handled by their former masters and the PRU distaste for working for the Special Police.

The PRU were a highly select and secretive covert organization that targeted and captured or killed between 700 to 1,500 communists each month from 1967 to 1972.[156] These numbers have given a mystique to the PRU and Phoenix program that they were CIA assassination squads. There may be some truth to that as “in the words of Douglas Valentine, a CIA operations chief in the Northern Highlands, ‘Sure we got involved in

[155] Ibid., 166.

[156] Ibid., 173.

assassinations. That's what the PRU were set up for, assassinations. I'm sure the word never appeared in any policy directives, but what else do you call a targeted kill?'"[157]

Analysis

The strategic environment of the Vietnam War was one of an undeclared war that evolved from the covert support by the United States for French colonialism into one of the most iconic battlefields of the U.S. containment policy towards the Soviet Union and the spread of communism. From a few planes and some military equipment, the United States within ten years found itself with over 500,000 conventional troops deployed and mounting protests in the United States against the war and its conduct. Protests centered on the perceived immoral covert wars against the North Vietnamese people. The counter-insurgency campaigns that brought such negative exposure both to the military and the CIA were a direct response to Viet Cong infiltration and terrorism.[158]

The operational setting involved essentially two separate wars: an overt war between conventional South Vietnamese, U.S., North Vietnamese, and Viet Cong forces, and a counter-insurgency war fought between South Vietnamese police, U.S. advisors, and the Viet Cong shadow government. While this research primarily addresses the second war, it was heavily influenced by the first especially considering the desire of the U.S. military to use counter-insurgency forces to support the conventional war. Another characteristic of the operational environment was the government of South Vietnam,

[157] Adams, 139.

[158] Pacalo, 116-117.

which through its actions displayed a lack of interest in creating an environment hostile to insurgencies but friendly to the government.

The CIA's initial involvement was as the covert facilitator of weapons, equipment, and supplies to the French, then transitioned to advising the South Vietnamese counter-insurgency program and finally active paramilitary operations conducted against the VCI in South Vietnam. These covert action programs were run concurrent to their "normal" operations of human intelligence and network development. The CIA's operations ran the gamut from the strategic to tactical levels, but as the war became more and more conventional during the late 1960's, the CIA was drawn further into the tactical fight against the VC units and less against their infrastructure and shadow government.

The story was much the same for SOF units. Initially brought in as advisors, then transitioned into the CIDG program, and from there to offensive programs, SOF units also operated from the tactical to the strategic levels, conducting operations across South Vietnam into nearby denied areas. SOF used local surrogates very well to unconventionally disrupt the VCI operations and under the umbrella of coordination called Phoenix proved able to target large numbers of the communist cadre within South Vietnam as well as their supporters in Laos and Cambodia.

In terms of interconnectivity, linkage between the military and CIA counter-VCI programs and the civilian pacification programs was challenging and "perhaps the greatest shortcoming"[159] of these organizations during the war. Nonetheless, the military

[159] Moyar, 48.

and paramilitary aspects of pacification were well-coordinated as "the CIA and U.S. military intelligence organizations often shared information directly with each other. CIA officers provided intelligence concerning the VCI and their protectors to U.S. units… The CIA called on those units when the PRUs were otherwise occupied or lacked the necessary mobility or firepower."[160]

Operations in Vietnam were considerably more synchronized between the CIA and SOF than in the Korean War. However, as the war took a more conventional turn, that coordination turned away as well and the military tried to separate itself from what General Westmoreland characterized as the "immoral, criminal" CIA operations.[161] However, the covert and clandestine activities in Vietnam were largely successful due to the division of labor that occurred between the CIA and military. Each paramilitary or surrogate force had a very specific role assigned to it. While the roles often changed over time, the duplicative nature of operations in Korea were seemingly reversed. While the CIA paramilitary wing had the most unambiguous mission, to eradicate the VCI, the SOF military unconventional forces were on the periphery. They generally supported the activities and goals of the Phoenix program, but at the edges rather than directly. Whether by attacking the support channel along the Ho Chi Minh trail, the logistics base within the VC army units, or the mass base through psychological warfare, a clear division of labor between the CIA and SOF was much more evident than had been the case during the Korean War. However, the eventual over-conventionalization of unconventional forces

[160] Ibid., 143.

[161] Adams, 116.

proved to be detrimental to those ends as these forces became less flexible as the war progressed.

Additionally, the contemporary roles of both the CIA and SOF were starting to materialize. The CIA were still executing the intelligence collection and analysis mission with specific targeted collection in support of their action arm the PRU. They also had direct linkage to the SOF elements which, in the event the PRU were unable to accomplish a task, could assume the mission. These direct lines of communication and specific roles and responsibilities are increasingly important as the redundancy was limited compared to the Korean War. The CIA also realized that they did not have the resources to execute their programs on a massive scale like the military wanted, so they acted on a more limited scale and more precisely. "The CIA is able to handle activities like the PRU on a selective and highly targeted basis, but when it comes to doing it on a massive scale, we just don't have the personnel resources to do it."[162] The military created its own version that avoided redundancy by creating bigger forces more capable of larger fights with the tradeoff of less capability with intelligence collection.

This analysis of the case study of clandestine and covert operations by the military and the CIA in the Phoenix Program during the Vietnam War is summarized graphically in Table 3 below.

[162] Moyar, 167.

Table 3. Phoenix Program Case Study Analysis

Case Study	Strategic Setting	Operational Setting	CIA Role	SOF Role	Interactions analysis
Phoenix Program	Limited War; initially used French, then GVN as bulwark against communist expansion	Two wars: conventional and counter-insurgency; both impacted the other greatly but slowly the conventional war took center stage	Strategic: Direct targeting of VCI senior leadership; Operational: Intelligence-centric; Tactical: Initially Independent counter-insurgency program against VCI, slowly became conventionalized	Strategic: Cross-border operations into neutral countries to disrupt logistics flow Operational / Tactical: Used forces to directly support military campaigns especially late-60's	Good trending down in late 60's; Intelligence sharing was excellent, both contributed to the other's programs; very beneficial relationship; turned sour as military feared connection to "assassination" squads

Source: Created by author.

Case Study #3: El Salvador

In the late 1970s the political situation in the small Central American nation of El Salvador began to deteriorate. After controversial legislative elections in 1974 and 1976, and a presidential election in 1977 consisting of significant intimidation and gross corruption, many people became disenchanted, including elements of the military. Some of these elements believed the wide-spread corruption and incidents of security force

abuse against the people required an active hand to force regime change. This belief led to a military coup in October 1979.[163] The coup failed to restore and promote order however, and political stability disappeared "replaced by a series of military and civilian juntas incapable of restoring order."[164]

The most significant insurgency group to raise from this period was the communist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional, FMLN). Following their offensive to overthrow the government in January 1981, which was barely repulsed by the Salvadoran Army, they escaped into the countryside to begin a guerilla war.[165] This development was of significance to the United States as "compelling and conclusive" evidence showed that the new communist Sandinista government in Nicaragua was directly and indirectly supporting the FMLN. Their support, which included American weapons captured by the North Vietnamese during the Vietnam War demonstrated to the U.S. government that the El Salvadoran communists were involved in a global communist conspiracy. This conspiracy began at the top with the Soviet Union, filtered through Cuba, into Nicaragua and finally to the FMLN.[166] Initially noticed by the Carter administration, this direct intrusion into the affairs of the Americas was unacceptable.

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[163] Blum, 354-355.

[164] Wise, 175.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Bob Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 113.

To combat this, the United States began supporting the newly established "reformer" government of El Salvador, in the words of President Ronald Reagan "to halt the infiltration into the Americas, by terrorists and by outside interference, those who aren't just aiming at El Salvador but, I think, are aiming at the whole of Central and possibly later South America, and, I'm sure eventually North America."[167] In support of the sovereign government, the United States began multiple programs that both directly and indirectly supported the Salvadorans including overt and covert action. Following the model of the last two case studies, this study will begin with the military effort then transition to the CIA operations followed by the analysis as outlined in chapter 3.[168]

Department of Defense

The military had two separate lines of operation in support of the El Salvadoran military. First, they institutionally trained the El Salvadoran armed forces and, second, they advised and assisted the El Salvadorans in the field.[169] "At their peak, U.S. advisors probably numbered no more than 150 men, mostly Army [in country]. Among the 3,600 uniformed Americans who served in El Salvador [from 1980-1992] were members of the 3rd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group… as well as the Air Force 16th Special Operations Squadron."[170]

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[167] Blum, 352.

[168] For the listed factors see pages 28-30.

[169] Wise, 176.

[170] Richard K. Kolb, *Cold War Clashes: Confronting Communism, 1945-1991* (Kansas City, MO: Veterans of Foreign Wars, 2004), 133.

The institutional training mission began with the activation and training by Special Forces of a series of Immediate Reaction Battalions (IRBs). These forces were quick reaction forces capable of responding to guerilla activity.[171] They generally concentrated in the urban areas and were primarily used defensively in support of the police and security services. Additionally, the U.S. military established two regional training facilities to train the El Salvadoran military in general military practices and counter-insurgency. The first training center was built in Honduras in 1982 and the second in El Salvador in 1983. Through their training efforts and with significant military aid from the U.S., the El Salvadoran Army grew from 20,000 to 65,000 men with the security assistance package growing as well from $42.4 million to $704.7 million in 1982.[172]

The military's second line of operation was their advising and assisting of El Salvadoran brigades. Each of the six brigades of the El Salvadoran Army occupied a military zone within the country. The advisor team associated with each brigade was limited to training of forces and operational planning only. There were significant constraints placed on them as the U.S. government, and the Reagan administration was very sensitive to avoid even the appearance of getting the U.S. involved in "another Vietnam." To that end, advisors were limited to a total of fifty-five in country at one time and they were officially prohibited from participating in combat operations.[173] However,

[171] Wise, 176.

[172] Ibid., 177.

[173] Ibid., 176.

there were reports, generally limited to news sources, of sightings of American combat troops fighting with government forces.[174] The military did directly support government forces with aerial reconnaissance and ground based human intelligence collection, but was prohibited by the Salvadoran government from directly and unilaterally engaging guerilla forces.[175] The advisors carried weapons and were frequently engaged by guerillas as they accompanied troops into the field and during attacks against El Salvadoran military bases. U.S. servicemen were directly targeted in several attacks, which was not the case with the covert operations of the CIA in El Salvador.

CIA

While possessing many clandestine sources and informants in El Salvador prior to and during the coup in 1979, the CIA was not directly involved in the coup. However, recognizing that the deposed President General Carlos Humberto Romero was a brutal leader, and mindful of the recent fall of Nicaragua to the Sandinistas, the U.S. began to send overt military and financial aid to the new Salvadoran government to keep them favorable to the U.S. The CIA also prepared a presidential finding calling for propaganda and political support for the moderate Christian Democrats in El Salvador. This support would help provide them the legitimacy needed to promote democratic ideals and the economic means to be a major ruling party. The primary beneficiary of this covert CIA

[174] Blum, 358.

[175] Kolb, 134.

assistance was the U.S. educated CIA informant, Jose Napoleon Duarte. Duarte was elected in 1984.[176]

Duarte's election was the culmination of a series of covert political actions designed to promote free elections generally and Duarte specifically. The CIA and the administration believed that the U.S. was on shaky moral ground because despite espousing democratic ideals, the government junta backed by the U.S. was committing frequent human-rights violations. The Salvadoran government was accused of atrocities varying from rape and murder to torture and execution of their communist opponents and sympathizers. This led the CIA to provide additional covert political aid to the government to combat this negative press coverage, promote free elections and gain the upper hand against the communists.[177] These political action and propaganda programs would target El Salvador directly with the intermediary, Nicaragua, and the source of trouble, Cuba, being targeted in other ways.[178]

Simultaneous with its covert political and propaganda support in El Salvador, the CIA began to develop a paramilitary force designed to operate in Nicaragua to disrupt the flow of aid to the FMLN in El Salvador. Initially organized as a 500-man force, they were to disrupt the economy and capability of the Sandinista regime in order to prevent their support to the FMLN guerillas in El Salvador. The CIA also included in this program further political and paramilitary actions against any Cubans operating in

[176] Woodward, 117.

[177] Ibid., 134.

[178] Ibid., 117.

Central and South America.[179] These actions, particularly the paramilitary force which would eventually grow to a proposed 7,000 men, spread across all of Central America and was shaping into a regional anti-Nicaraguan force.[180] There was support for this plan from both the State Department and the Pentagon as U.S. policy was generally anti-Sandinista, and the financial support amounted to an initial $19 million.[181] While controversy surrounds this force and the CIA and USG activities in Nicaragua, the aim of reducing arms trafficking into El Salvador from Nicaragua was achieved with the flow being reduced to a trickle by 1985.[182]

Analysis

The strategic setting of El Salvador was characterized by an increasingly tense Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Proxy wars between the two became more prevalent following the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. The United States, and the Reagan administration in particular were wary of potential Soviet interference in the Western hemisphere and were particularly sensitive to the "backdoor" or "front yard" of the United States in Central America. To lose in El Salvador, as they had in Nicaragua, was inconceivable and had to be avoided.[183] This was coupled with continued fatigue

[179] Treverton, 109-110.

[180] Woodward, 233.

[181] Prados, 379.

[182] Treverton, 147.

[183] Woodward, 112.

within the United States of the Cold War and military interventionism, especially following the events in and fall of Vietnam.

The operational environment within which the military and CIA operated in El Salvador during their civil war from 1980-1992 was two-fold. It included first, an overt military assistance program with some clandestine intelligence collection and, second, a covert political action and propaganda program within El Salvador complemented by a covert paramilitary program in neighboring Nicaragua to cut off military supplies to the FMLN insurgency. The overt side remained very limited over concerns about a repeat of the Vietnam War, which had ended less than a decade before, and the covert side remained limited by a series of congressional amendments, including the Boland Amendment that stipulated that "no money could be used 'for the purpose of overthrowing the Government of Nicaragua or provoking a military exchange between Nicaragua and Honduras.'"[184] Further evidence of these limitations was the greater degree of oversight by the Congress. Many of the oversight requirements previously discussed in this thesis emerged during the conduct of this covert conflict.

In El Salvador, the CIA conducted significant covert political and propaganda actions to support the democratically elected government of El Salvador to prevent their falling to the communist FMLN. They propped up and helped get elected to the presidency their one-time informant Duarte. Supporting the campaign in El Salvador, the CIA also supported anti-communist "black" propaganda emanating from Nicaragua with

[184] Treverton, 145.

a newspaper called La Prensa.[185] The CIA also conducted various covert paramilitary activities in Nicaragua, including attacking bridges and port facilities, to disrupt the military and economic aid provided to the FMLN by the Sandinistas.

SOF however, were generally limited to overt contributions to the overall effort within El Salvador. They assisted the CIA in training –and nothing more- of paramilitary forces covertly in Honduras. Within El Salvador, SOF supported the Salvadoran training facilities and served as advisors to all of the Salvadoran military brigades. While forces, including those with U.S. SOF, were routinely engaged by the FMLN guerillas, their combat actions were reported as defensive only. SOF also conducted intelligence collection, including ground human intelligence, to report on the locations of the rebels and assist in the planning of attacks to destroy them.

In terms of interconnectivity, the overt and covert programs were intertwined in purpose and intelligence sharing, however, the two elements remained generally separated. The CIA's activities attempted to take advantage of military successes and programs while downplaying the reported atrocities committed by the El Salvadorans. The SOF operators provided additional capability to the CIA paramilitary officers by providing training support to their paramilitary forces. This seemingly positive relationship carried through from the highest levels down to the operators, but there was likely some tension following the El Salvadoran atrocities which might have reduced the effectiveness of the CIA's political actions.

[185] Woodward, 113.

This analysis of the case study of clandestine and covert operations by the military and the CIA during the civil war in El Salvador is summarized graphically in table 4.

Table 4. El Salvador Case Study Analysis

Case Study	Strategic Setting	Operational Setting	CIA Role	SOF Role	Interactions analysis
El Salvador	Other than War; U.S. support to U.S. friendly foreign elements	Two lines of operation: overt military counter-insurgency mission and covert political action, propaganda and paramilitary operations	Strategic: Built a regional covert anti-communist alliance; Operational: Political action in support of El Salvadoran government; Tactical: Limited in El Salvador but conducted paramilitary actions in Nicaragua to support El Salvador operations	Strategic: Limited Operational/ Tactical: Military training for both El Salvadorans and CIA paramilitary force; human intelligence collection through Salvadoran military	Intelligence sharing was excellent, both contributed to the other's programs; very beneficial relationship

Source: Created by author.

Having examined three cases of the use by the U.S. of the armed forces and the CIA to carry out clandestine, covert and covert-like activities in three conflict environments during the Cold War, this research now turns to the contemporary environment of the early twenty-first century. This final portion of the analysis will set the conditions for comparison of the cases with current practice, using the model set out in chapter 3 and graphically depicted in the charts at the end of the three case studies.

The Contemporary Environment

The contemporary strategic setting of the United States is one of the Gray Zone wherein the United States is actively competing with foreign nations. Some are friendly competitions, such as most interactions with Europe, and others are more confrontational as with Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. These conflicts and their associated campaigns are generally classified as political warfare. Political warfare is reminiscent of the Cold War with the Soviet Union wherein state relations were under enormous tension, and while competing in armed proxy conflicts, the superpowers maintained their competition under the threshold of violence (an unknown metric that if the violence crosses a certain line, the opposition will respond violently). This maintenance of the threshold in the contemporary environment is often as important or more so as achieving short-term objectives or long-term effects. None of these interactions are active conflicts, at most they are conflicts through proxies, such as in Syria between the U.S., Russia and Iran, or conflicts of influence, such as in the South China Sea and over the Philippines between the U.S. and China. This is the character of political warfare. Separately, the U.S. is actively involved in combatting non-state actors both directly and indirectly across the world. These conflicts are generally associated with the Global War on Terror

(GWOT) and take many forms of involvement from direct conflict in Afghanistan to advise and assist operations in Niger.

The contemporary operational setting varies within the strategic setting but is characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity. In some operations, there is a known enemy and U.S. forces are directly or, through host-nation forces, indirectly engaging the enemy. These complex environments are complicated only due to the guerilla or insurgent tactics used by the enemy. The U.S. has a declared enemy in these conflicts such as the Taliban and Al'Qaeda in Afghanistan or Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin of Africa, and engages them with various platforms while trying to operate through the host-nation(s). In other conflicts, such as Syria, the lines are much more muddied. The U.S. is engaging in political warfare with Russia and Iran over influence surrounding Syria and the Assad Regime, while simultaneously engaging violent extremist organizations using anti-regime forces that are considered terrorists by other nations. This extremely convoluted and politically sensitive conflict offers many opportunities to heighten the tension between nations. Other conflicts that are more passive such as the debate over the South China Sea involves a great deal of posturing and political maneuvering but currently does not involve active combat.

Through all this, the CIA performs multiple roles in line with its overarching mission. Strategically, they are tasked with collecting human intelligence through networks spread across the globe and are, as such, spread across the globe themselves. They are the principal agency responsible to the president for all-source analysis of intelligence at the strategic level and they are still responsible for covert action. With an unknown number of active programs, these operators are also likely spread across the

world focused on the various "hot-spots" of terrorism and state conflict. At the tactical level, the CIA's counterterrorism center conducts tactical level operations through paramilitary forces or unmanned drone strikes.

The Special Operations community also has multiple roles in these conflicts and gained a great deal of prominence under the Obama administration as he seemingly desired to use smaller, more precise military means over large-scale conventional means to execute his foreign policy. Thus, between the GWOT and Global SOF Network, separate but mutually supportive operations, SOF are also spread throughout the world conducting Special Operations within their twelve core activities. At the strategic level, USSOCOM has reportedly been tasked with leading U.S. global counter-terrorism operations and multinational coordination[186] and countering weapons of mass destruction,[187] both are within the bounds of USSOCOM's charter and operational scope. Additionally, having been given combatant command of all SOF worldwide, the Commander, USSOCOM has significant global reach and requirements for global response.[188] At the operational level, USSOCOM's elements are leading and supporting

[186] Dan Lamothe, "Special Operations Command Takes a Lead Role in Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction," *The Washington Post*, December 23, 2016, accessed January 20, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2016/12/23/special-operations-command-takes-a-new-lead-role-countering-weapons-of-mass-destruction/?utm_term=.8767ef794ebf.

[187] Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Dan Lamothe, "Obama Administration Expands Elite Military Unit's Powers to Hunt Foreign Ffighters Globally," *The Washinton Post*, November 25, 2016, accessed January 20, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2016/11/25/obama-administration-expands-elite-military-units-powers-to-hunt-foreign-fighters-globally/?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.fa05064fecb4.

[188] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 6.

campaigns across the range of military and special operations, from direct action in Somalia and Afghanistan to Preparation of the Environment and Foreign Liaison in Africa and Eastern Europe. With multiple operational level commands including the Theater Special Operations Commands, Special Operations Commands Forward, and Special Operations Joint Task Forces, USSOCOM is spread out and operating globally. At the operational and tactical levels forces are concentrated in various types of operations and through the Global SOF Network they are preparing for future conflicts.

The interactions between the CIA and SOF increased during the U.S. campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan with the direct interactions between the two to kill or capture high value targets and produce other positive effects on the battlefield in support of the overall campaign. Taking Afghanistan as an example, the CIA covert paramilitary support to the Northern Alliance turned into a delayed attribution unconventional warfare campaign with U.S. Army Special Forces. This turned into a full SOF and CIA commitment to counter the various terrorist and violent extremist organizations found there and across the borders with neighboring countries. These engagements were part of the hunt for Osama bin Laden and general targeting of terrorists. Elsewhere, the CIA and SOF work very closely to share intelligence and operational information as evidenced by the roles each played in the Osama bin Laden raid in 2011 wherein CIA intelligence led to action by USSOCOM units.

Comparison

From the individual analysis of each case study, this research will now compare them to each other and to the contemporary environment. This comparison is depicted in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Case Study Comparison					
Case Study	Strategic Setting	Operational Setting	CIA Role	SOF Role	Interactions analysis
Korean War	Limited War; prevent greater commitment by Communists	War; active conflict between U.S./ROK/UN and NK/China	Strategic: Paramilitary into China and NK; Operational: Intelligence-centric, limited direct support; Tactical: Independent Guerilla warfare campaigns against China and NK	Strategic: Psychological operations designed to cause mass defection and surrender Operational/ Tactical: partisan attacks directly supporting or independent of military campaigns	Poor; active competition for the same resources and operational areas; poor relationships led to limited operational sharing or cross-support above the tactical level
Phoenix Program	Limited War; initially used French, then GVN as bulwark against communist expansion	Two wars: conventional and counter-insurgency; both impacted the other greatly but slowly the conventional war took center stage	Strategic: Direct targeting of VCI senior leadership; Operational: Intelligence-centric; Tactical: Initially Independent counter-insurgency program against VCI, slowly became conventionalized	Strategic: Cross-border operations into neutral countries to disrupt logistics flow Operational/ Tactical: Used forces to directly support military campaigns especially late-60's	Good trending down in late 60's; Intelligence sharing was excellent, both contributed to the other's programs; very beneficial relationship; turned sour as military feared connection to "assassination" squads
El Salvador	Other than War; U.S. support to U.S. friendly foreign elements	Two lines of operation: overt military counter-insurgency mission and covert political action, propaganda and paramilitary operations	Strategic: Built a regional covert anti-communist alliance; Operational: Political action in support of El Salvadoran government; Tactical: Limited in El Salvador but conducted paramilitary actions in Nicaragua to support El Salvador operations	Strategic: Limited Operational/ Tactical: Military training for both El Salvadorans and CIA paramilitary force; human intelligence collection through Salvadoran military	Intelligence sharing was excellent, both contributed to the other's programs; very beneficial relationship
Contemp. Environ.	The Gray Zone: Political Warfare and the GWOT	Ranges from active military campaigns combatting terrorism to passive diplomatic campaigns with of covert and military engagement	Strategic: Intelligence collection and analysis for POTUS; Operational/ Tactical: human intelligence collection and covert action	Strategic: Counter-terrorism, counter-proliferation missions; Operational: Global SOF Network Tactical: Special Operations 12 core activities	Intelligence sharing and operational cooperation in GWOT

Source: Created by author.

Case Study Comparison

The covert activities conducted by the military and the CIA during the Korean War were substantially more disorderly than those conducted in later conflicts. For the CIA this was largely due to the fact that it was a new agency in 1950 and the Far East Command Commander did not trust them. For the military, following significant demobilization after WWII, experience was lost. Later in Vietnam, some of these issues were resolved as both organizations built on their capabilities for covert activities between the wars and there was an increased cooperation with each other. The cooperation demonstrated within the Phoenix Program was still strained by the MAC-V and their focus on the conventional war as opposed to the counter-insurgency campaign. This led to the CIA maintaining tighter direct control of their paramilitary forces and refusal to hand it over it to the military. Tension was added after the famed "Pentagon Papers" were released and a negative spotlight was shone on the CIA and their "assassination program" in Vietnam. The military then backed away from the CIA to keep the military role in the war separate. In El Salvador, very distinct and clear lines were drawn between the operations of the CIA and military, lines that were further codified when USSOCOM was established in 1987. While the overt military assistance program and covert political action programs in El Salvador never coalesced together, the addition of a SOF specific command did facilitate additional intelligence sharing and cooperation that was evident in the 1989 invasion of Panama.

At the end of the Cold War, the lines between the CIA's covert action and SOF activities were fairly well established especially in relation to actions against the Soviet bloc. This separation was radically altered following the attacks of 11 September 2001.

Following those attacks, the lines between the CIA and SOF have become increasingly muddied. With the CIA reportedly conducting covert paramilitary operations and drone strikes in places like Syria and Pakistan, their actions overseas can be perceived as increasingly militarized. Meanwhile, especially with the implementation of the Global SOF Network, SOF are increasingly overseas establishing a small unit presence across the globe to conduct PE, looking increasingly like the CIA.

Through the Korean War, the Vietnam War and into other Cold War conflicts like the U.S. intervention in El Salvador, the bi-polar world that characterized the Cold War was evident in the roles and responsibilities of the CIA and military SOF. While still maintaining their overall intelligence collection and analysis focus, the CIA focused its covert action programs almost exclusively on countering communism and Soviet influence. As such, the CIA's operatives became exceptionally proficient at covert action. The increasing exercise of congressional oversight increased their responsibility to the U.S. government and people.

The military, however, was far less singularly focused. Rather than a lengthy campaign, the military was faced with periodic and long-term foreign engagements that often reduced their overall capacity. Their overt overseas use became less desirable following the fall of South Vietnam in 1975. The military was left to answer for the catastrophic loss of life and political failure there. Fortunes changed in the early 1990's as the CIA was left without an enemy to focus on after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and instead worked to find the next strategic threat. The military found their saving grace during the Persian Gulf War that demonstrated their competence and

effectiveness. Following 9/11, however, both began focusing on counter-terrorism in response to the perceived threat growing across the world.

As the active conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq began to lose steam around 2010 however, political warfare began to occupy a more prominent position in strategic thinking for the U.S. government. The case studies presented in this chapter well-characterize how the CIA and SOF communities developed capacities that support political warfare. These case studies also provide valuable lessons to be learned about the SOF CIA relationship that will be addressed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research has been to determine whether the utilization of the Global SOF Network by the DoD to conduct covert action would be duplicative of ongoing CIA covert action programs. Qualitative methods were used beginning with a review of the literature to assist in defining the current strategic environments within which SOF and the CIA operate and the capabilities of each organization. From this framework, a comparative analysis was conducted between three historic case studies involving covert-like activities and the contemporary strategic setting. This chapter details conclusions and recommendations derived from this analysis as well as recommendations for future research.

Conclusions

The current state of world affairs is a complex and uncertain environment. Unlike during the Cold War, the world is not bi-polar, but unlike the last 16 years, counter-terrorism and the rise of non-state actors cannot be the sole focus of the U.S. security apparatus. The Gray Zone that face the U.S. government and its interests are as varied as they are numerous, however two major security challenges are the ongoing political warfare between the U.S. and its major state competitors and the GWOT. These security challenges are taxing resources and capacity for operations. Considering this resource constrained strategic environment, the use of the Global SOF Network by USSOCOM and the U.S. Government to conduct covert-like activities would be unnecessarily duplicative of the current capabilities and mandate of the CIA. It would be duplicative, on

one hand, because the Global SOF Network was not designed to be used covertly and making it covert would cloud the covert action chain of command unnecessarily. On the other hand, the roles of SOF and the CIA, while interconnected, are well defined for justifiable reasons.

The Global SOF Network is not inherently a covert-like program, because it was designed to be an overt military-to-military relationship endorsed and accepted by participating nations to build the capability of U.S. and host nations' forces through combined training while granting additional operational reach to USSOCOM. Its overt nature is the source of the Global SOF Network's strength. Through it, SOF can extend across the globe and develop strong partnerships built on trust. Changing the nature of the network could drastically reduce its effectiveness. This type of change was seen with the CIDG in Vietnam, which was originally designed to be a defensive program to prevent VC and VCI influence in the rural areas of Vietnam.

Following Operation Switchback, the military and MACV-SOG turned the defensive capability of the CIDG into an offensive weapon. While they still contributed to the overall effort, they were much less effective than the PRUs, which the CIA created as an offensive weapon and used as such. The military took the local irregular forces and moved them away from their locale to Vietnam's borders with Laos and Cambodia. This change drastically reduced their overall effectiveness as they were unfamiliar with the new operational area. While still capable of conducting reconnaissance, raids, and ambushes, their lack of connection to their new surroundings prevented effective human intelligence gathering. The PRUs, on the other-hand, as they remained under the exclusive control of the CIA, were much more successful as they had local connections to

their areas of operation and used them to target VCI more directly and as a “rifle shot.” This case study shows that changing the overt nature of the Global SOF Network to “get in the game” like the MACV-SOG in Vietnam, could reduce the overall effectiveness of the program. Any positive results from the switch would be in spite of the change, not because of it and would muddy the chain of command unnecessarily.

Covert action and covert-like activities, especially paramilitary operations, often require a large amount of coordination and synchronization. A partisan raid against a hostile airfield will achieve effects, but these effects are amplified tremendously when combined with other offensive actions like a simultaneous conventional attack against front-line units. This kind of coordination is exactly what the CCRAK and JACK in Korea were designed to do. The JACK was designed to coordinate the various intelligence and covert action programs of the CIA under one sponsor to prevent operational fratricide and ensure mutually beneficial operations. Likewise, the CCRAK was created to do the same for the military partisan operations and to synchronize with the CIAs JACK. Regardless of conflict between the CIA and the military, both organizations were intended to clean up the covert paramilitary operations chain of command to coordinate resources and operations and synchronize results.

While the CCRAK came about too late to have much direct impact on the Korea War, it is a valid example for the contemporary environment. The CCRAK demonstrated a capability to prevent operational fratricide and synchronize effects, whether the effects are in a total war, a limited war, or completely covert scenario. Operational fratricide results when the mission of one organization corrupts or exposes another’s through direct confrontation or indirect compromise. It occurred in both Korea and Vietnam. Such

operational fratricide could result from the use of the Global SOF Network as a covert-like activity by adding an unnecessary layer of coordination and command. The clear lines and command authorities of U.S. diplomatic missions overseas would be muddied by adding an additional military operation separate from the "routine" operations of the mission. These "routine" missions come with clear roles and levels of operation for the major players that support unified action toward the political warfare goals of that U.S. mission.

The strategic goals of the USG are usually clearly defined by the President and the administration. These goals have broadly included containment of communism, combating of terrorism, and promoting national economic interests. However, once these goals begin to be dissected at the regional and embassy level, a great deal of flexibility is given to the individual mission to achieve them. Usually there is a mix of the elements of national power, overt and covert programs, with the Department of State and the CIA having clearly delineated lines of authority as shown in figure 2 in chapter 2. SOF's role, which is country and mission dependent, is more ambiguous. In some instances, SOF are engaged in security cooperation and the Global SOF Network. In others, SOF are conducting clandestine operations and covert raids. While SOF offers a multitude of capabilities, their roles are and ought to be clear as well. These roles were clearly demonstrated by SOF in El Salvador. While the CIA was conducting covert action in support of the government, and the Department of State was conducting their "routine" overt diplomatic engagements, SOF were supporting both separately.

The primary responsibility of SOF in El Salvador was overt and directly supported the Salvadoran government through the training and combat advising of their

military forces. While limited to 55 operators in country at a given time, SOF could advise each of the Salvadoran Brigades in their areas of operations as they conducted counter-insurgency operations. This overt mission was successful because military forces did eventually force the capitulation of the FMLN insurgents. Simultaneously, the CIA was conducting various forms of covert action including political and influence operations against the guerillas and paramilitary operations in Nicaragua. The paramilitary operations the CIA used in support of targeting cross-border movements were a coordination point between the CIA and SOF. With this program, the CIA, while maintaining overall control, used the military and training expertise of SOF operators to train and support their paramilitary force.

This relationship kept the CIA role at the strategic level and the SOF role at the tactical level. The CIA was focused on containing the regional Sandinista threat and its influence in El Salvador. SOF provided tactical level overt advising of the Salvadorans and covert support to the CIA's paramilitary operations. This type of relationship was apparent throughout the case studies as SOF support to CIA covert operations. In the contemporary environment, this relationship also facilitates Congressional oversight, with the CIA primarily responsible to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and SOF under the DoD answering to the House and Senate Armed Services committees. With clear roles and separation of responsibilities, transparency before Congress is assured.

Building partner capacity is the major support that the Global SOF Network provides. It facilitates USSOF working with and through foreign SOF to build their capacity to resist foreign influences and internal threats. This directly combats the

influence of hostile nations and their use of unconventional warfare, such as Russia's "little green men" in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine and Iran's Quds Force providing support to the Houthi Rebels in Yemen. The Foreign Internal Defense goals of the Global SOF Network directly and overtly combat influences such as these. This relationship facilitates intelligence collection and analysis through overt contacts, but this program should not be confused with the clandestine methods employed by the military and CIA to collect information of intelligence value.

Under certain circumstances, the Global SOF Network could be used to perform a covert-like activity -supplementing the capability and capacity of the CIA- that if executed deliberately could have a profound impact on U.S. political warfare objectives. In theory, in the event a nation contributing to the Global SOF Network was taken over by a hostile power or collapsed under an insurgency, the SOF connection could facilitate a clandestine relationship useful for a U.S. sponsored UW campaign including covert paramilitary operations. Therefore, while developing the Global SOF Network, USSOF should consider this eventuality in determining who it seeks to align and partner with, particularly if a nation is in danger of becoming a failed state. However, clandestine relationships should not be formed until needed as the risk to the overall program and its global access is too great. These networks directly contribute to the political warfare of the U.S. the goal to build and maintain influence. Losing influence through trying to form clandestine relationships where they are not needed poses unnecessary risk.

Therefore, using the Global SOF Network within the white or light grey of peaceful steady-state relations (see Figure 1 on page 8) would be redundant to the CIA and ill-advised. However, in the circumstances set out on the preceding paragraph or

others similar to those in which the MACV-SOG used GVN forces to conduct covert raids into Laos and Cambodia, the use of the Global SOF Network in support of covert-like activities could be beneficial and complementary to the covert efforts of the CIA if properly synchronized. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Recommendations

Within potential scenarios that characterize the current Grey Zone state of international affairs, SOF should be prepared to use the Global SOF Network to conduct covert-like activities. To this end, this research recommends that SOF build a capability to exercise command and control of covert CIA paramilitary operations. This proposed relationship would have the CIA maintain overall control of all covert action at the strategic level with SOF taking the lead for paramilitary and influence operations (the latter in support of paramilitary programs) at the tactical and operational levels. This approach follows the PRU model during the early to mid-1970s, when SOF were conducting combat patrols with the PRU under the overall control of the CIA, and represents the use of the Global SOF Network in support of political warfare.

Coordination and synchronization are just as important today as they were in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador. Concerns have arisen, for example, that duplicative efforts by SOF and the CIA have led to paramilitary forces fighting each other in Syria.[189] While at least at the unclassified level these are only news reports, with the

[189] Nabih Bulos, W. J. Hennigan, and Brian Bennet, "CIA-Armed Militias are Shooting at Pentagon-Armed Ones in Syria," *Chicago Tribune*, 2016, accessed April 14, 2017, http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/nationalsecurity/ct-syria-militias-us-cia-islamic-state-20160326-story.html.

chaotic environment of Syria, it is entirely possible that these reports are accurate. Therefore, this research recommends that the CIA restrict their activities to strategic intelligence collection and covert action similar to the CIA's assistance to the government of El Salvador to combat the FMLN insurgency. This should be the focus of the CIA globally because it takes a very long time to develop such operations and the CIA's persistent presence is far more reliable than SOF, which generally focus on high-threat areas and OPE to conduct aggressive results-based operations. SOF and the Global SOF Network should focus on overt military-to-military relationships to align potential paramilitary leaders and forces to USSOF in the event the need arises for overt support or covert-like activities to accomplish U.S. policy goals.

Recommendations for Future Research

This researched focused almost exclusively on two forms of covert action within the framework of U.S. political warfare: paramilitary operations and covert influence. These activities represent only a portion of the covert capabilities of the U.S. and only one type of campaign the U.S. is involved in. The following are other significant areas for further research that would complement this study.

Cyberwarfare is becoming increasingly important regarding U.S. national and security interests with new cyber commands being created in multiple agencies and departments within the USG. As cyber is also inherently covert, or in the very least, has delayed attribution, there is ongoing discussion over which agency or department should have primacy for covert cyber action. While these actions could likely be incorporated into the broader categories of covert action including political, influence, and economic, due to the resource requirements, should the CIA maintain control over them? Should the

DoD or its subsidiary the NSA? This research did not address these questions but they would enhance the debate over whether the CIA should turn over more covert action programs to other government bodies.

Additionally, this research only moderately addressed covert influence operations focusing mainly on paramilitary operations while the debate of reforming the U.S. Information Agency to take the reins of both overt and covert diplomacy is also beginning. As the digital, social media age continues, the USG is unable to compete with non-state actors' messaging. Is it time to reconstitute the USIA to encompass both overt public diplomacy and covert influence operations? Would such an organization compliment the CIA or again be redundant?

The political warfare considerations also limited the scope of this research. Additional research is needed to further explore the idea of transferring all covert action capabilities from the CIA to SOF or another government agency as was discussed by several authors referenced in chapter 2. Specifically discussing the various covert action operations being undertaken within the GWOT such as drone strikes and paramilitary forces.

Final Conclusion

This research was conducted to determine whether the expansion of the Global SOF Network to include covert-like activities would be duplicative of current ongoing CIA covert action programs. Through a comparative analysis of three historical case studies and the contemporary environment, this research concludes that such a program in the Gray Zone environment would be duplicative of the CIA and, in general, counter-productive.

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